

CUTTING THROUGH THE BULL

PART 2

I'VE GOT YOU COVERED!

STUART GRAMENZ

**P.O. BOX 180
ROCHEDALE SOUTH,
QUEENSLAND 4123,
AUSTRALIA.**

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**To
Luke**

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CUTTING THROUGH THE BULL

WHY “THE BULL”?

In our series of “Killing Sacred Cows”, we saw that, above all, God desires to have a personal and intimate relationship with each and every believer, resulting in our being led by His Spirit to love and serve others.

All the way through bible history, we see attempts to totally substitute this relationship for something else or bring in religious replacements to cause an ungodly mixture of partly Him and partly man.

Under the leadership of Moses, God wanted to speak directly to His people. However, because of their fear and unbelief, they rejected it. Ex. 19:5,11; 20:18,19. Instead, they molded a substitute, an image of a young bull as a sign of God's presence among them. Many have thought that this was a total substitute for God but, as we'll see, it was in fact, a mixture.

So when Aaron saw it he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said “Tomorrow is a Feast to the Lord.” *Ex. 32:5*

Matthew Henry, in his commentary says:

...he built an altar before it, and proclaimed a feast to the honor of it, a feast of dedication, yet he calls it a feast to Jehovah; for, brutish as they were, they did not imagine that this image itself was a god, nor did they design to terminate their adoration in the image, but they made it a representation of the true God, whom they intended to worship in and through this image and yet it did not excuse them from gross idolatry...

It was an attempt to worship God through an image. However, it was a mixture, and it was worship on their terms and not His.

As we saw in “Killing Sacred Cows”, if we are overwhelmed by the possibility of an intimate relationship or reject it because of either fear or guilt, we have a propensity to find something religious, tangible or visible to fill up our void. We can dedicate this to the Lord or call it the Lord's work, but in reality it creates a mixture and becomes a man-made substitute.

We find this mixture occurring again in 1 Kings 18 when the King of Israel, Ahab, marries Jezebel who was an idol worshipper of the god, Baal. Even though Ahab believed in the Lord, in an attempt to appease his wife he set up an altar for the worship of her god, opening up the door for a mixture of two beliefs.

The people, although they believed in the Lord, played follow-the-leader and, as a result, there was a mixture; a belief of God on one hand and an attraction to the enjoyment of the more sensuous excesses of idolatry on the other.

The Lord, through the words of the prophet Elijah, brought drought on the land, which was symbolic of the spiritual dryness of the people. God then used Elijah to challenge the people to come back to Him.

"How long are you going to waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God follow him! But if Baal is God follow him."
1 Kings 18:21 NLT

To cut through their double-mindedness, a demonstration of God's power was needed and Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a showdown. They were both to build separate altars and place a bull sacrifice upon each of them. Both were to pray, and if Baal brought fire down on their bull, then he would be God and (of course) the same applied to Elijah and the Lord!

The prophets of Baal started first, praying and pleading for hours with no result. Elijah's prayer met with immediate results. Fire came down and turned the bull into ashes.

God cut straight through the bull worship and, as a result, the people came wholeheartedly back to Him and to obeying Him.

NEW TESTAMENT MIXTURE

The early church made 'loving Him and loving others' central in their lives and, as a result, they turned the world upside down. However, the impetus was lost and by the Fourth Century the leader of the Roman Empire, Constantine, combined the pagan and Christian faiths, resulting in a mixture of God's will and pagan tradition. For centuries the church blindly followed these traditions, believing this was the way God wanted His family to operate.

The Lord has been cutting through the "bull" traditions, replacing them with His truth. However, there's still more to be brought to ashes if we're going to be totally restored. That's why there are many Christians still feeling spiritually dry or going through a drought and, as a result, cannot understand why they've lost the life they had as new believers.

In some cases they're still playing follow-the-leader in a system which can provide substitutes for personal relationship and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Most of us are aware that anything which puts God second is an idol! An idol can be your sport, your house, your career, your relationships, what you consume. However, the most deceptive and seductive idols for many well-meaning Christians are the subtle religious things we introduce as a substitute for our personal relationship with God and the obedience that comes from it. These religious acts become traditions in the church and are then blindly followed.

MAN'S TRADITIONS

The Pharisees suffered from the problem of doing-things-for-show or ritual rather than from their hearts.

What did Jesus have to say about it?

"All too well you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your tradition".
Mark 7:9

Whilst we would be horrified to think that this could apply to us, we must realise God is continually restoring truths that were lost during the Dark Ages in order to bring us to perfection. Removing traditions has happened throughout restoration times in church

history and this will continue to happen. God has His traditions, His principles. (1 Cor. 11:2). However, we can be tempted to mix or replace these with our own traditions which bring about the same result as found in the Pharisees.

"...making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do". *Mark 7:13*

Today, in the church, we still can do things because we feel comfortable and safe when "We've always done it like that". Even with the recent moves of restoration in the last century we still can identify certain traditions. These are holding back the effect of God's Word in building our relationship with a total dependence on Him. Jesus said, *"And many such things you do"*.

In our earlier books on "Killing Sacred Cows" and the "Weapons of Mass Distraction" series, we saw that continuous fulfillment, peace and joy can only come through a personal and intimate relationship with Him and being led by His Spirit to help others. Jesus told us that the greatest commandments were to love God and to love our neighbors. Anything which substitutes for that or is considered more important will have us wavering between two opinions.

As with our earlier books, we're going to look at more of the "bull" traditions that the Lord wants to cut through, which will enable our hearts to come wholeheartedly back to Him. If we can lay down our traditions as a sacrifice, then He can send His laser-like Holy Spirit fire to burn-through the religious excesses and bullish attitudes.

FIRE AND RAIN

In Elijah's story, as soon as the double mindedness was removed, God's blessing was restored, there was a deluge and the drought in the land was broken.

For those Christians who are feeling spiritually dry, as we allow God's fire to burn through our traditions and bring them to ashes, He can then pour out His refreshing rain, His Spirit, and see us filled and empowered with His love, His peace and His joy.

God will give you the fire of His word to remove any traditions that are holding you back, so you can constantly be filled with and led by His Spirit.

OUR PRAYER

If we need lightning and fire for the rain of His Spirit, then our prayers should reflect this. Many have prayed for life to be injected into the church or for God to pour out His Spirit upon us. Let's now realize that our traditions can be the hindrance. If they are torched, then His Spirit will flow and the spiritual drought in many of our lives will be finished.

In this book, we're going to look at the subject commonly referred to as "covering".

As we do so, let's pray that the Lord will reveal any of man's traditions and that anything which is not of Him will be removed. As a result, your relationship with Him will be further restored and a continuous flow of His Spirit will result.

CHAPTER 1

SUBMISSION AND AUTHORITY

In some circles there is teaching telling us we need to be “covered” by a particular church or denomination, which in turn, provides some form of spiritual protection. For those Christians who are not in a traditional church structure, the question often asked is “Who’s your covering?”

In other circles, the word “covering” may not be used, but the message conveyed is that by simply being a member or attending meetings of the particular organization or group, there lays spiritual security or safety.

Is this teaching sustainable from God’s word?

Before we deal with the covering question, we need to have a greater understanding of a few other subjects. In our first two chapters we will deal with;

Submission

Authority

Accountability

SUBMISSION

When we hear the word, “submission” in regard to the church, most of us will immediately think in one way terms...submission to leaders. However there is a requirement of elders and equippers to serve believers.

“... he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger and he who governs as he who serves.” *Luke 22:26*

“... but whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many.” *Matt. 20:26-28*

“... nor as being lords over those entrusted to you ...” *1Peter 5:3*

“But aren’t we supposed to submit to our leaders?” you may ask. Obviously, the answer is yes...and there are Scriptures to support this:

“Obey those who rule over you and be submissive...” *Heb. 13:17*

“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders.” *1 Peter 5:5, 6*

There would seem to be a contradiction here. How can we have believers submitting to leaders and yet leaders, in turn, being servants and slaves to them?

We have two sides of a coin here and both are based on heart condition.

THE HEART OF THE ELDER

When an elder reads: *“Obey those who rule over you”*, there’s a propensity for some to lose their servant’s heart and become little lords. The word *“rule”* has been poorly translated in the following Scriptures in the King James and other versions.

“Remember those who rule over you...”

“Obey those who rule over you....”

“Greet those who rule over you.....”

Heb. 13:7, 17, 24

The original Greek word “hegeomai” means to lead, guide or go before. Also in Scripture:

“Let the elders who rule....”

1 Tim. 5:17

The Greek word “proistemi” means to stand before, lead, to attend, guard, and provide care for. The heart of an elder is not meant to dominate or control the saints, but to serve, model, guide, guard and provide care.

HEART OF THE DISCIPLE

In the scripture, “Obey those who rule over you”, the translation of “obey” is “peitho” in Greek, once again, a poor one. It means to persuade or to win someone over.

W.E.Vine;

“The obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion”.

Therefore, Heb. 13:17 should more correctly read; Be teachable and be persuaded by those who lead and guide you.

It shows that trust is a vital aspect of this relationship. Elders earn trust... they shouldn’t demand it.

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word”.

Heb. 13:7

For believers to have confidence in, and be persuaded by elders they must consider the outcome of their conduct. In other words, “Are they a model of Jesus’ works?”

In the early church, there were no denominations. We submit ourselves to people, not to organizations, in other words, to those with whom we have relationship, to those whom we sense we can trust.

SUBMISSION BY CHOICE

For example, if an elder said to a person whom he had recently led to the Lord; “John, God has a great future for you and you have an enormous potential and destiny. I want to help you bring out those gifts, talents and abilities and overcome anything that would hinder you in fulfilling your destiny. I’m here for you day or night to help.”

If the new believer truly has the Spirit of Christ in them, and they sense a genuine father’s heart, they’d say something like, “If you really mean that, I would like to submit myself to you. If I’m ever out of line, I give you permission to get me back on track.”

Notice, the elder is not demanding submission because he’s the boss. He’s offering to serve, train and sacrifice for the new believer to help him reach his greatest potential. The believer is persuaded (and chooses) to submit out of that expression of love.

1 Peter 5:5 says; *“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders”*. A biblical elder does not command submission. People submit themselves to a servant heart.

JESUS' EXAMPLE

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many.”

Matt. 20:25-28

What is it that touches our hearts and persuades us to submit to Jesus?

He forgives our failures.

He gives us a new start.

He gives us a new destiny.

He gives us His life.

He gives us His power.

He gives us ongoing love and guidance.

Out of His giving, His serving and His sacrifice to us, we are humbled and submit our lives to Him. This submission is in the liberty of love, not in the bondage of law.

Jesus is the perfect model for elders. Shouldn't every overseer imitate His way?

TRUSTING SUBMISSION

Once His disciples saw what He wanted to do in their lives, they submitted to Him. Out of that, His instruction to correct when needed was willingly received.

He admonished His disciples at times:

“O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? ...”

Matt 17:17

“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Matt. 14:31

Why did He correct them? Was it to show them who's boss...or to make them realize they had great unused potential and stir them on to greater things?

AUTHORITY

We are, however, instructed to submit to the elders' authority ... but authority over what? Surely they don't have direction for every part of our lives; where you go for a holiday, what kind of motor mower you're purchasing, changing jobs, etc. etc. These examples may be rather obvious but where does the dividing line start and finish?

Jesus' Authority

Where did Jesus' authority come from?

“For I have not spoken on my own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.” ***John 12:49***

“The words that I speak to you I do not speak of my own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.” ***John 14:10***

This is why Jesus' words were so powerful. He didn't just say things off the top of His head as many of us do. When He spoke, lives were changed, miracles occurred and demons fled.

His words were only effective and had authority because the Father told Him to say them.

Jesus tells us:

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”. ***Matt. 28:18***

He has all the authority. However, He doesn't give any one man full authority to rule over a particular group of people.

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet is shall not be so among you; ...”
Matt. 20:25, 26

He delegates parts of His authority to the various parts of His Body, giving each disciple a role to play. The apostle Paul was given ***“our authority which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction.”*** ***2 Cor. 10:8 (also 13:10)***

Equippers have been given authority to assist in bringing the saints to perfection *“to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”* They have not been given total authority over every part of believers' lives. They are to be men of prayer, who should be able to say, like Jesus, *“I do not speak on my own authority, but what the Father who sent me gave me a command of what I should say and what I should speak.”*

The example of speaking with His authority is not only for equippers but for every believer. We all need to be prayerful and careful when we desire to correct or direct others.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue... ***Prov. 18:21***

Spirit-led words will always be potent, while words from our own flesh can be destructive or manipulative.

But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law ... ***Gal. 5:18***

Putting it round the other way, if what you say is not led by the Spirit, then it is law... it becomes legalism.

PARABLE OF THE LECTURERS

In high school or tertiary level of education, you may have lecturers who specialize in particular fields like mathematics, English, chemistry etc. One person can't teach everything. Their authority lies within the knowledge they have of their subject. Once a student graduates, the teachers have no authority over them. However, the pupil uses the principles they've learned to help them with their calling in life. Whether they're now a bricklayer, nurse or doctor, their area of authority or giftedness can be a blessing to those who taught them.

Our apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers each have areas of equipping authority. They all have a part to play in believers' spiritual education. If they're gifted in particular areas of equipping, believers will recognize and respect that gifting and submit to the area of authority God has given them. However, our tradition has one person attempting to teach and equip in every subject, instead of a team.

The teacher is then forced to go beyond the anointing God has given them and "borrow" other ministries' messages. This is why some equippers' messages don't have the authority or anointing within them. They are merely replays of someone else's anointed message rather than something they've received from God.

You can either be a voice or an echo.

Knowing that they don't have total authority, but only delegated authority in particular areas, will ensure they instruct and direct only where God tells them to, and not attempt to go beyond their gifting.

"...for they watch out for your souls, as ones who must give account". Heb. 13:17

What are they accountable for?

First of all, they are accountable to God to give instruction to believers in order to help each one become a fully matured Christ-like person.

Secondly, they are accountable to ensure they don't exceed their God-given assignment and begin to totally rule over you with Gentile authority.

My brethren, Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment...If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. James 3:1,2

However, there's a difference between our teachers in the natural and those in the spiritual.

Unlike our natural teachers, our spiritual equippers are "family" and should become friends and lifetime mentors to us. As believers "graduate" to fulfil the individual role and vision God has for them, the equippers are there to counsel them as required. Believers can obviously submit to their elder (older) fatherly advice, wisdom and experience. As trained "sons", they now have spiritual gifts, power and authority, they can, in turn, bless those who equipped them.

PARABLE OF THE LIFESAVER

Here's another parable which may help us understand more clearly an elder's role.

One of the terms used to describe an elder is an overseer.

“...the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God.”

Acts 20:28

There's a lot of difference between an overseer and a boss.

Lifesavers (or lifeguards) are a good example of being overseers. In Australia, because of the dangers of swimming in the surf; particular protected areas are marked by flags and patrolled by committed lifesavers.

Why do people swim between the flags? First of all most people don't have the strong swimming capabilities as a lifesaver. Secondly, they know why lifesavers positioned the flags in a particular spot. The lifesavers have swum in the water earlier and determined the safest place to surf.

If a wave or rip starts to gradually pull those swimming sideways out of the safety zone, they may not realize it. The lifesaver now draws their attention to this through a loudspeaker or whistle and guides them back to safety. They are persuaded by his superior knowledge in the situation and they submit to his authority. He's not trying to boss them around, he's trying to make their day enjoyable and keep them alive.

Quite often, we hear of people who swim outside of these areas and drown. Imagine how frustrated the lifesavers must be if people keep disobeying their directions. Even worse, how do they feel if someone drowns just a few hundred yards up the beach in an area not patrolled?

Elders, as the name implies, are older or more experienced in God's Word. They have already swum through the spiritual waters of life and know many of the currents and rips that can cause you trouble. They are there, not as dictatorial bosses, but as guides, counselors and coaches, to help you make a success of your life.

As we're learning to be totally led by the Spirit, there are times when we can be carried away by spiritual rips. There's nothing more painful than someone who says, "God told me" and won't listen to the advice of a pastoral lifeguard. If we do stray outside the spiritual flags and fail to notice it, we need to be open to listening to those who love us and want to see God's best for us.

Be responsive to your pastoral leaders. Listen to their counsel. They are alert to the condition of your lives and work under the strict supervision of God. Contribute to the joy of their leadership, not its drudgery. Why would you want to make things harder for them?
Heb. 13:17 MSG

DISCERNING SHEEP

To gain the respect of the saints, the attitude of the elders needs to be Christ-like. They are to be servants, slaves, giving their lives to see that you're equipped for your ministry. Shepherds will sacrifice their lives for the sheep. Christians aren't fools; they'll eventually pick up on the attitude and spirit of their leaders.

Are the saints there to help the leader's ministry or are the overseers there for the saint's ministry? If Christians discern that a leader is all about building his empire instead of the growth and care of each believer, the respect and fruit of submission will not be evident.

Care for the flock of God entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly - not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your good example.

1 Peter 5:2, 3

The shepherd is also a sheep under the Chief Shepherd. Our equippers and overseers are to lead by example, not by lording it over believers. Note also it says they are entrusted to them, not given to them.

SUBMISSION – EACH WAY

Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

1 Peter 5:5

We're told to submit to one another. Does this possibly mean that an elder would have to submit to us? As we mentioned earlier, it's submitting to an area of gifting or authority that God has given to each of us. For example, because of a lifesaver's knowledge of the water, he receives my submission when I go to the beach. However, if I'm a doctor and he comes to the surgery, he submits to my authority in that area.

Another situation would be that of a father and son. There's a time where, as a child, the son is under the father's guidance and authority. He submits to his dad. However, when he's trained, he leaves home, gets married and the relationship changes. If the father's been a good dad and gained the trust and respect of his son, he becomes his friend. Out of that respect, the son will seek advice on life, raising kids, buying a car, all of which the father has had experience with. If his dad's a mechanic, he'll certainly submit to his advice in that area.

However, the father also recognizes his son's talents. If the son is a successful accountant, he'll submit to him at the end of the financial year and receive his advice and guidance. Their relationship doesn't end when he leaves home, it continues on throughout their lives, both respecting the talents and helping each other in their areas of expertise.

The same can apply in the spiritual family. If a pastor receives a God-given prophecy from one of the sheep, he'll submit to that. A person with gifts of healing can pray for a teacher, they can submit to that. Each of us has a part to play in the body of Christ ... some are fingers, noses, eyes etc.

And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

1 Cor. 12:21, 22

Each one has a part to play and we submit to the grace and ability each one has.

This is a little poem which may help us in discerning the kind of elders who can be an example to us and to whom we can submit.

I'D RATHER SEE A SERMON

**I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
I'd rather one should walk with me than merely show the way.
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear;
And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds,
For to see good put into action's what everybody needs.**

**I soon can learn to do it if you'll let me see it done;
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run.
And the lecture you deliver may be very wise and true,
But I'd rather get my lessons by observing what you do;
For I might misunderstand you and the high advice you give,
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.**

**When I see a deed of kindness, I am eager to be kind.
When a weaker brother stumbles and a strong man stays behind
Just to see if he can help him, then the wish grows strong in me
To become as big and thoughtful as I knew that friend to be.
And all the travelers can witness that the best of guides today
Is not the one who tells them, but the one who shows the way.**

**One good man teaches many, men believe what they behold;
One deed of kindness noticed is worth forty that are told.
Who stands with men of honor learns to hold his honor dear,
For right living speaks a language which to everyone is clear.
Though an able speaker charms me with his eloquence, I say,
I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day.**

Edgar Guest (1881-1959)

SUMMARY

1. Elders are to be servants and slaves to other believers.
Disciples are to be submitted to elders.

2. The word “*rule*” is poorly translated. It actually means to serve, guide, and provide for, not to dominate or control.
3. Why do we submit to Jesus? He has sacrificed so much for us and we know He has a genuine care for our well being.
4. Disciples who are “*persuaded*” that their elders have the believers’ welfare as a priority will “*submit themselves*”. They will not need to have someone lord it over them.
5. Jesus’ words had authority behind them for one reason. He only spoke the words the Father gave Him.
6. Like high school teachers who have authority in certain subjects, elders have certain areas of authority in their teaching. You can be a voice or an echo.
7. We are all to submit to others who exhibit God given authority in a particular area.
Example: A doctor submits to a lifeguard at the beach. The lifeguard submits to the doctor at his surgery.
8. Elders are spiritual lifeguards, don’t be a pain to them in their area of expertise.
However, they can receive or submit to the blessings others have to offer.

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What was the greatest truth you discovered?
2. What was the point you least understood?
3. What can you apply in your life this week?

CHAPTER 2

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is an important aspect of every believer's life. Many would, perhaps, think that because we're to be submitted to one another, automatically we'd become accountable to each other.

Some believe that biblically the two words mean the same thing but this is not the case.

The word for submit, "hypeiko" means "to yield". Webster's Dictionary says "yielding to the power or authority of another".

The word for account, "logos", means "an account which one gives by word of mouth". W.E. Vine. Webster's Dictionary describes accountable as "liable to be called to account or responsible."

Therefore someone can yield or submit to the authority of another but not be ultimately answerable, liable or responsible to that person.

MAN OR GOD?

To whom do we submit and to whom are we accountable?

What does the bible have to say about it?

The New Testament, doesn't teach accountability to a person.

The Scriptures teach us that we're expected to be responsible or give account for our words and actions to God ... not to man.

Most of us would be aware that on Judgment Day we'll be answerable to the Lord.

For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ. So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. **Rom. 14:10 & 12**

However, He is expecting that we, through our relationship with Him, are to be answerable to Him on a day to day, (even) moment to moment, basis.

And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. **Heb. 4:13**

We are also told that with our ministry or service we are to be responsible to Him not people.

... with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men. **Eph. 6:7**

Therefore we make it our aim ... to be well pleasing to Him. **2 Cor. 5:9**

We already know that we are to submit to one another. How then is it possible that we can submit to another believer and yet not be ultimately accountable to them?

PARABLE OF THE BOSS

The owner of a business interviews you for a job, and you're in awe of his achievements, vision and obvious care for his workers. You get the position and are now placed under an overseer.

Unlike the owner, he has little concern for you and seems only interested in his own promotion. Because of the problems you have with him you do your job, but only half-heartedly. You do the minimum requirements, enough to please your supervisor, but you're working well below your potential.

The owner sees the problem and talks to the overseer. "I've taken him through the company manual," the supervisor explains, "and he knows what he should be doing. I give him orders but he always seems to be dragging the chain!"

The next day the owner calls you into his office, concerned about your productivity, and draws out of you the reason for your lack of motivation.

The boss reminds you it was he who gave you the job because he saw great potential in you. He makes it quite clear that you're ultimately working for him, not the supervisor. He further reminds you the overseer is only passing on his orders.

You suddenly have a different perspective.

Where once you were just doing enough to satisfy your supervisor, you now know the boss is keeping an eye on you to see if you're worthy of promotion. You submit to the direction given by your overseer, knowing that his orders actually come from the owner. Ultimately however, you realize you're accountable to the boss and all your efforts are for Him.

The Lord chooses certain ones of us to come into His Company and appoints overseers to train and watch over us. These overseers may have shortcomings but despite their imperfections, God uses them to pass on His instructions to help equip us.

As workers for the Lord, we're told:

Work hard, but not just to please your masters when they are watching. As slaves of Christ do the will of God with all your heart. Work with enthusiasm as though you're working for the Lord, rather than people. *Eph. 6:6, 7 NLT*

... always keeping in mind that no matter who happens to be giving the orders, you're really serving God. *Eph 6:7 MSG*

Therefore we submit to His instructions passed on through others, but ultimately "as slaves of Christ" we are answerable to our Boss.

PAUL THE SUPERVISOR

Now it could sound as if we are promoting the kind of elders who don't speak with any conviction and authority and merely make suggestions...not so! As an overseer, there were obviously times when the apostle Paul knew he was passing on a direct order from "the Boss."

Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord; ...

1 Cor. 7:10

...for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

1 Thes. 4:2

When Paul received something from the Lord, he commanded and spoke powerfully, no quarter given. Therefore, we're not promoting a wimpy leader who can't speak with authority when God so leads them.

Please note we're also saying their word only has authority when God tells them to speak it. Nevertheless, Paul was able to see the difference between giving a command from the Lord and being a lord over someone.

Consider the way he spoke after they had been taught the basics.

Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you ...

Phlm. vs 8 & 9

Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ ...

Rom. 15:3

Now I urge you, brethren ...

Rom. 16:17

I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children to warn you

1 Cor. 4:14

So Paul would unequivocally speak out what "the Boss" required, but then would appeal, urge, beg, beseech, and encourage them, instead of commanding or shaming them into submission. He was more interested in their obeying willingly, with goodwill doing service as to the Lord, not to men.

MUCH MORE

Paul demonstrated that he didn't want the saints to be accountable to him. Instead, he wanted them to be aware of an ever-present God dwelling in them and leading them.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation in fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure.

Phil. 2:12,13

They obeyed "much more" in his absence than when he was present with them. What was it that caused this incredible motivation "to work out your own salvation"? They no longer had Paul to answer to or looking over their shoulder.

- These people had a vision of God's destiny for them.
- They knew they were being changed from spiritual weaklings into spiritual giants.
- They realized they were sons of God who were to grow into mature people, who could do the works that Jesus did and greater things.
- They knew God was working in them and through them to do this.
- The thought of remaining spiritual wimps was horrific.

- To stay babies and not grow, or even worse, be disqualified, brought a sense of fear and trembling.

Paul desired for them to be persuaded and to do things out of their own free will, “*from the heart*,” rather than lording it over them and receiving obedience through dictatorial bullying or making them feel guilty. He spoke with authority, but never took authority over them. God’s *word* was to dominate them, not him. He gave the word of the Lord without compromise, encouraged them to do it, and left them accountable to the Lord. The result, as we said, was that they did “*much more*” in his absence than when he was present with them.

AN EXAMPLE

It’s an example to all believers in the way we treat others. When we sense we have something direct from the Lord to pass on to a brother or sister and deliver it in love, not in a spirit of control, the person will sense that and, with your encouragement, hopefully receive it.

If they don’t act on it, you have no authority to speak into the situation... unless further prompted by the Lord.

So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore... ***Rom 14:12,13***

We can sometimes try to help the Holy Spirit do His work by adding our extra little piece of advice.

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth;”
John 16:13

Hopefully when somebody is convicted and repentant, they will in humility submit themselves to another and be obedient to the Scripture:

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. ***James 5:16***

This is not about accountability, it’s about submitting to one another for your own benefit, receiving healing and ongoing aspects of your total salvation come through confession. *Rom 10:10*.

CHILDREN OR SONS?

There may be those who are thinking, if we’re not accountable and answerable to a person, it opens the gate for us to be slack in our service.

This would have to be childish thinking. If a believer thinks this way, it reveals how unaware they are of the very presence of God in them. They feel they can be better at answering to someone who would know little about them in comparison to an all-knowing God to Whom “*all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him.*”

Are we little children who think we can get away with things, or are we sons and daughters who are aware that He knows everything?

TICKING THE BOXES

At present, many believers are quite happy with the traditional accountability system. Anyone of us can “tick the boxes” to impress our pastors. What does “being accountable” actually mean in the average church? There are those who can come to services and prayer meetings, give offerings and because of attendance are considered to be and appear to be good “accountable” members. However, deep in their hearts those same people know they are probably still living far below God’s best for them.

Even at a more intimate level, a person could say, “I am accountable to my home church leader, we have one-on-one discussions every week.” When they talk to their mentor, they can pass the spiritual check list with flying colors.

Are you going to the services?

Are you reading your Bible?

Are you praying?

However, they can carefully edit certain parts of their lives and give enough information to give the impression they’re doing well spiritually. The leader is satisfied but wonders why the person doesn’t seem to grow.

Traditional “accountability” to man can fall well short of a standard required to produce Christ like disciples.

Only a personal relationship with the Lord and answering directly to Him will ultimately solve the problem of those who simply attempt to appease others. Pretending otherwise and continuing to teach accountability to man will only exacerbate the problem.

ACCOUNTABILITY...SECOND NATURE

We read earlier, how was God working “in” them “*to will and to do His good pleasure*”?

Paul equipped his disciples to be sheep who know God’s voice. The Lord talked to them and they were accountable to Him for what He instructed them to do.

Knowing that He has great plans for us should be a motivating force for us to talk to and be answerable to Him on a daily basis. Obviously this kind of understanding will *lift* our standard of behavior ... not lower it.

On the other hand, if we feel we’re to be accountable to people, human nature can instinctively behave selfishly and as a result, we do the minimum requirements to merely satisfy those who are around us.

We are told to serve;

“not with eye service, as men pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ... ” ***Eph. 6:6***

We can see we’re not working for others, trying to impress them or show how good we are. We’re servants of the Boss and only when that finally sinks into our minds can we really do it from the heart, rather than for eye service or show.

New believers may feel they have to be accountable to their spiritual parents: Whilst this is a natural response, we must, as soon as possible, have them understand the difference between submission and accountability. They can then be weaned from the natural desire to be accountable to a “father” to the supernatural desire of being answerable to *the* Father.

Christ is the Head of the church directing every single part of His Body. (1 Cor. 11:3) Therefore, as He leads each particular member to do their part in equipping, directing, guiding, guarding, encouraging and helping each other, we can submit to each one's God-given assignment. However, at the end of the day, we're accountable to the Head for what we do with their instruction, gifts and assistance to us.

This should be a totally natural progression as you grow from little children to sons who are led by the Spirit.

When you hear from and are directed by the Lord, being accountable to Him instinctively becomes second nature.

TWO EARS, ONE MOUTH

We're equipped with two ears and one mouth. Use them proportionately so we spend more time listening and less time in fruitless chatter. When encouraging or advising others, if we only speak the words He gives us, they will have the authority of heaven behind them. As a result, our word, like the words of Jesus, will have power and authority and achieve a result.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue...

Prov. 18:21

ELDERS ACCOUNTABILITY

There is great responsibility for those who are church elders. There are many Christians whose lives (and sometimes their faith) have been shipwrecked because of presumptive authority. Elders do not hold *carte blanche*, or free-hand jurisdiction over others, and they need to ensure that any direction or correction is coming directly from the Lord.

The Father told Jesus “...*what to say and how to say it.*” *John 12:49 NIV*

Elders will stand accountable before the Lord for the direction and correction they give.

... for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.

Heb. 13:17

Therefore, elders have a God given authority to teach the word of God without compromise, equip saints to be led by the Spirit and then, as the Lord leads them, give words that will help the saints keep on track. Like Paul they can urge, beseech, beg and encourage without guilt trips or bullying tactics.

...let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

James 3:1

As mentioned earlier, they are not accountable to God for what you do with their instruction...you are.

TITLES OR FUNCTION!

One of the dividing lines between the ministry and “laity” has been that of titles. A person calling an equipper, "Pastor so and so", can create a sense of someone being superior to the average Christian and that we owe them some kind of special reverence. This can bring the accountability factor into play again with a believer perceiving them as their spiritual boss. The bible talks of overseers in terms of being “among”, not above.

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers ...”
Acts 20:28

The New Testament talks of authority in a particular area in terms of function. In other words, the emphasis is more on the job than on the title. God’s more interested in some fulfilling a role, (pastoring/shepherding for instance), rather than being called a pastor. Paul doesn’t call an overseer an office bearer. He calls the job “*a noble task*”. 1 Tim. 3:1 NIV.

If we’re going to place an office or title on every ministry gift, why do we have to stop at “Pastor”?

And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.
1 Cor. 12:28

If we look at all the ministry gifts in 1 Cor. 12:28 why can’t we give people the title according to their gifts?

Miracle Worker Jones,
 Healer Smith,
 Administrator Brown,
 Tongue Talker Green.

This is obviously over the top, yet we seem to be content giving our overseers titles.

This has been a traditional hand-me-down, and whilst seeming innocent enough, it has the propensity to help create (in some overseers) an over-inflated view of themselves. It can also perpetuate a thought that those who are not elders or overseers have a second class ministry.

Jesus was totally antagonistic toward those who wanted to give themselves a title or position for the sake of public praise or prominence.

“Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.”
Matt. 23:9-11

The bible obviously does refer to teachers, and Paul called himself a father. There’s a difference, however, between being given a teaching role and being called “teacher” by your students. There’s a difference between being a father to someone and being called “father” by them.

What Jesus was attacking here was a heart attitude, those seeking titles were doing it so they could be seen as greater and lord it over others. Those who are truly great, get on with the job of teaching, pastoring or fathering, not looking for some pre-eminence or title so they can boss others around, but seeing themselves “among” the others. They see their particular gifting not above anybody else’s gifting, simply just their part of the Body ministry.

RESPECT?

“What about respect for overseers”, you may be thinking?

We’re to have equal respect for every part of the Body of Christ, knowing that each part has an important role to play. Those overseers who have gifted authority from God will gain respect as their anointed teaching, wisdom and spiritual gifts are ministered with a servant’s heart, not by enforcing respect through titles or position given to them.

“Honor your father and mother” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” *Eph. 6:2,3*

This applies to natural parents and spiritual parents. As we give honor to those mothers and fathers in the Spirit, we can receive blessing as well as bless them.
(1 Tim. 5:17)

FOR HIM AND TO HIM

Also, when we act as servants toward our brothers and sisters in Christ, we’re not only doing it for Him, but also to Him.

“Assuredly I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.” *Matt. 25:40*

Obviously because we are all parts of His Body, and Christ is in us, as we serve one another, we also serve Him. Whilst many may know the Scripture, have we renewed our minds and seen Christ in our wives, husbands, brothers and sisters and served the Christ in them? In other words, if Jesus lived in our home, how would we treat Him? If we really did this, and served the Christ in them, how much better would the daily service be?

REWARDS

Whilst our motivation should be that we know we’re pleasing God, realize also that God encourages us to do this because it releases a spiritual principle of blessing.

..with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord ... *Eph. 6:7, 8*

Also, being ultimately accountable to the Lord will ensure that your mind is going to be on Him even more, and will help improve your growing relationship with Him. Besides, you won’t be disappointed if those you’re serving don’t appreciate what you’re

doing. If you're doing it for Him and to Him, I know that He doesn't miss one act of kindness or love, therefore you can't be disappointed.

FALSE EXPECTATIONS

When we feel we're working for someone else, a wife for instance, serving her husband or vice versa, usually that person won't appreciate everything we've done for them. As a result, we can judge them, get upset and expect that they should've noted our efforts and given us more thanks or some reward. However, when we do it "with goodwill doing service as to the Lord, and not to men," we don't place this same high level of expectation upon them. That way, if no one compliments your work, it doesn't really matter. However, if someone does give credit where it's due, you can regard it as a bonus.

What can happen when we do everything "*as to the Lord*"? We can release others from our unjust expectations and appreciate the relatively precious little they have to offer, without demanding or expecting more.

Herein lies another reward; with accountability to Him, instead of being angry or depressed, we can now replace it with peace and joy.

SUMMARY

1. Submission means to yield to someone's advice or direction.
However accountability means you are actually answerable or responsible to another for your actions.
2. Believers are to submit to other believers who have a God given instruction.
They are however, accountable to God, not to man.
3. Example: At work you can be under a supervisor who relays the boss's orders to you. You submit to those instructions but you are ultimately accountable to the boss.
4. We are to submit to our overseers (elders) when they relay God's word or instruction to us. Nevertheless we are accountable and answerable to **the** "Boss" for what we do with those instructions.
5. The apostle Paul passed on the orders from the Lord then he urged, beseeched, appealed and encouraged. He wanted them to do it willingly for the Lord, not out of a guilt trip or because he was looking over their shoulder.
6. Anyone can "tick the boxes" of attendance and appear to be accountable. At a personal level we can edit parts of our life to appease our mentors.
7. Only "little children" think they can get away with things. Realizing that the Lord sees everything and we are to be accountable to Him is the ultimate solution.
8. Paul's disciples were obedient "*much more*" in his absence because of their relationship with the Lord. A believer who is Spirit led will instinctively become accountable to God.
9. We have functions, not spiritual titles.
We father, but we are not called father.
We teach, but are not called teacher.
10. Do everything as unto the Lord, not to man. You can then release others from your unjust expectations.

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What was the greatest truth you discovered?
2. What was the point you least understood?
3. What can you apply in your life this week?

CHAPTER 3

"COVERED" OR "SMOTHERED"?

As mentioned earlier, in some circles there is teaching telling us we need to be "covered" by a particular church or denomination, which in turn provides some form of spiritual protection. For those Christians who are not in a traditional church structure, the question often asked is, "Who's your covering?"

In other circles, the word "covering" may not be used, but the message conveyed is that by simply being a member or attending meetings of the particular organization or group, there lays spiritual security or safety. Is this teaching sustainable from God's word, or simply another of man's traditions which in turn, makes God's word less effective?

We have left this subject till now because it was essential to understand biblical authority, submission and accountability before we tackled it. In reality, biblically speaking, it would be more appropriate to ask, "To whom are you submitted?" rather than "Who is your covering?"

"Surely they're simply different words for the same thing!" you may think.

In many situations this is possibly the case, with the true understanding of submission being taught and the word "covering" being used to encompass it. However, in other cases, the "covering" teaching contains aspects which don't fit into biblical submission. It's these false concepts we're dealing with here, so when we mention the word "covering" in this instance, we're referring to its unscriptural use.

"HEAD" QUARTERS COVERING

First of all, as previously mentioned, the covering teaching can imply there's some protection simply by being a member of a particular group. Submission, on the other hand, implies a submitting to "one another", that is to other individual Christians. Therefore, we cannot submit to a denomination, organization or entity. We can only submit directly to believers.

Secondly, whilst "covering" can imply that attendance gives you safety, submission implies that servanthood and obedience provides protection and blessing.

Thirdly, the "covering" teaching has evolved out of a pecking order or "chain of command" leadership model. The "layman" answers to the pastor, the pastor answers to someone with more authority, e.g. a district supervisor, and then it traces back to the highest ranked leader, a mother church or denominational headquarters. The "covering" flows down from "head" quarters.

The obvious question then must be; "Who covers the highest authority?" The only answer which can be offered is, "God", and that's a scriptural reply. But if God "covers" the highest authority, why is it He can't be directly covering the pastor, or even (dare we say it) ... the "layman"?

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT

As we've already mentioned biblically, the "covering by man" teaching has little backing. In the Old Testament, it was not used spiritually in connection with submission to one another.

In the following Scriptures there can be no mistake who the covering is.

He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge.
Ps.91:4

Hide me under the shadow of Your wing. Ps.17:8

The Lord is the covering.

That concept is sustained by Jesus.

"How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings..."
Matt 23:37

The word, "covering" is used only once in the New Testament (1 Cor. 11:3-16) and is mentioned in relation to the natural covering of a woman's head and from a spiritual aspect, the honoring of the headship of a husband in their home.

In this biblical example, God reveals His "chain of command", so-to-speak from His "Head" quarters.

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.
1 Cor.11:3

The head of every man is Christ!!

The denominational "headquarters" or "minister" are not the head of every man, Jesus Christ is.

It's also showing that although the husband is the head of his wife, they are mutually inter-dependent. The Scriptures go on to say:

Nevertheless, neither is the man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord.
V 11

We can see that the 1 Cor. 11 examples don't scripturally give substance to the theory that there's covering for believers from an organization or man. In fact, it teaches the opposite. This is a picture of a family being mutually inter-dependent and directly dependent on protection, guidance and relationship with the Lord, not under the "covering" of a senior minister, church or denomination.

A PAIN IN THE NECK

We are also reminded:

..Christ is the head of the church;...we are members of His body. Eph 5:23, 30

For a hand to function correctly in a natural body, it has to receive a message directly from the brain. Jesus is “the Brains” of His spiritual Body and we are His hands, feet, and so forth.

If God wanted to use you as “a hand” for Him, how would you most effectively operate? You could read books on what a hand is supposed to do. You could listen to CD's on how a hand functions. You could be trained by equippers and hear what they or other hands have done. All those things would be helpful. But in the end, if you are to be an effective hand, you need to hear directly from “the Brain.”

Every believer has the potential to hear directly from, and be led by, the Head. If this were achieved, the Body would be incredibly effective and many of our present problems would be resolved.

Using the head and body parable, some may argue that a hand doesn't operate independently. It's connected to a wrist, an arm, and a shoulder, all of which work together to achieve a goal.

Any parable has its limitations.

If you go beyond the specific truth it is attempting to convey, you can end up missing the main point. In a natural body, even if body parts are connected, each still receives its orders from the brain. No part moves under its own power nor independently controls another.

We are to learn to hear directly from our Head, our covering, and be led to do individual or corporate ministry.

Where do our equippers fit into the Body concept? They are part of the Body with an initial job description to connect each Body part to the Head so each one can hear directly from the Lord.

Secondly, as spiritual lifeguards, they're to be on the lookout for any spiritual diseases that may effect that communication.

Tradition has made some ministers think that their part in the Body is to be the neck. They feel their job is to receive messages from the Lord and direct the Body. No wonder so many parts of the Body are dysfunctional. In these cases where ministers have not equipped people to hear from God, they've simply become a pain in the neck and the Body feels the side effects and as a result ... it aches.

HOLES IN THE THEORY

Thousands of ministers, some extremely well known, have quit full time ministry, gone off the rails or fallen morally. The majority of these were supposedly under the protection and covering of their denominations,

Surely it must be obvious to everyone there's no special kind of carte blanche safeguard through being “covered” by head office. If it doesn't work for the leaders, how is it going to help other believers?

Nevertheless, the covering teaching is still being perpetuated by many of those who can see major holes in the theory. Why is this false speculation still being perpetuated?

First of all, there are many good hearted and sincere leaders who've just accepted the chain of command type teaching which the “covering” concept promotes, because they've simply trusted the head office teachings. Nevertheless there are other reasons.

WHAT ABOUT ERROR?

Secondly, there are those who would wish to defend the covering teaching and would be quick to point out there needs to be protection from every wind of false doctrine. Creating the fear of falling into error would stop this, they would reason.

The apostle Paul birthed churches and stayed with them for less than one year (in some cases) and about two or three years in others and then moved on. He didn't talk fearfully about the need for a covering. He'd laid a solid foundation, which was a personal relationship with the Lord and being led by His Spirit. Because he knew their foundation of accountability to the Lord was sure, he had an optimistic view of the churches and the work of the Holy Spirit.

...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. *Phil. 1:6*

And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. *2 Thess. 3:4*

Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything. *2 Cor. 7:16*

Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. *Phlm. vs 21*

I am fully convinced, dear brothers and sisters, that you are full of goodness. You know these things so well that you are able to teach others about them.
Rom. 15:14 NLT

Paul is convinced by faith not fear. He motivates the saints through confidence, not by concerns of failure.

Parents can stop their kids from swimming in the deep end of the pool by continually telling them they could drown. Alternatively, they could teach them to swim.

Leaders can continuously keep believers in fear of sinking through error or... they could teach them to avoid going under by hearing from and being accountable to the Lord.

CULTS?

"It's great to be positive but what about cults?" you may be thinking. Obviously some people can go off the track. How did Paul protect the church from cultish teaching? The foolish Galatians, who were seriously going off the rails, were simply sent a letter, with Paul giving them the truth. In his letter, he demonstrates his confidence in (both) them and the Lord, and trusts that the truth will set them free.

I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. *Gal. 5:10 NIV*

Yes, cults do cut themselves off from the Body of Christ, but the protection policy of covering can promote the same thing. We can be taught wittingly or unwittingly to distrust other parts of the Body of Christ.

Christians are to be equipped, growing from spiritual babies into sons and fathers and; *...by reason of use have had their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Heb. 6:14)*

If this is done, can't their equippers, just as Paul did, have confidence in their ability to discern if something is wrong in the Spirit? How did Paul find out the problem? Someone with discernment must have told him!

After basic equipping of the Spirit led life, there comes a time when the equippers must have faith and trust the Lord and the seeds of truth they've planted.

If they can't, is it an indication that they've trained the people to be dependent on them and the church meetings, rather than on the Lord?

If trained correctly and error does come in, the equippers simply need to remind the believers of the foundational basics ... just as Paul did. If the leaders have earned their respect, they'll receive it, and "the truth shall set them free"... just as it did with the Galatians.

THE JUDAS FACTOR

Obviously, there will be the odd rebel, who, like Judas, won't listen to anyone. Sadly, for those with a "Judas spirit" there's a penalty to pay. There are also going to be prodigal sons who think they know it all and wind up in spiritual pig pens. However, it's interesting to note that the Bible doesn't record that the prodigal's father bombarded his son with all the negatives of "covering" and kept him in his house through fear.

He was wise enough to know that there are some sons who can only learn through the "school of hard knocks". Instead, that father kept the door wide open, waiting for his child to return. Finally, when the son came to his senses, he realized, even though he'd made a mistake, his father truly loved him and understood there was provision for him there.

In these days, the Lord is releasing His children. In the midst of it, some will be totally rebellious, some just wanting to do their own thing.

How do we handle situations like this? By speaking the truth in love and releasing, **or** acting in fear and restricting? There's a fine line between God's guidance and legalistic direction.

The element of protection that "covering" teaching promotes, whilst, perhaps, given with sincere intention, is an over-emphasis that goes beyond what the Scripture provides. If anyone provided perfect protection, it was Jesus. Perfect equipping, perfect guidance, perfect love, yet Judas didn't respond to it. Jesus knew what was going on, yet He still released Judas into ministry with the others. Even when Judas' betrayal was imminent, He spoke to him about it and even called him "*friend*".

No matter how good our equipping is, there will be the occasional Judas. Let's not over react and restrict the others simply because of fear of rebellion in the occasional individual.

ANOTHER FEAR?

As we've said, in the majority of cases there can be a genuine concern for the saints going into error, there is another area which needs to be guarded against.

For those of you who have a potential equipping ministry, please take note.

In recent years, church growth has been at the forefront of some church leaders' visions. Growth of the church is a good thing, of course. However, in our present traditional system, this equates to growth of the numbers in a particular congregation.

Success can be evaluated on how many attend services and the building program. Unfortunately, as a result, there is a (not so subtle) pressure to keep up attendance figures. Denominational or peer pressure from other ministers add to the stress. The real fear and concern can be that the sheep may stray, which results in loss of numbers, income and prestige. Therefore, the "covering" teaching can be used as a scare tactic to hold people.

Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following. Watch out!

Acts 20:30 NLT

FEED THE NEED

Most Christians are aware that their single equipper (minister) cannot provide all the spiritual food needed to bring them to perfection. As a result, we have many Christians who are spiritually moonlighting, "sneaking" into other congregations to satisfy their hunger. Because of the fear of being branded "rebellious", or a sense of guilt because they've left the "covering" of their church, they're made to feel like naughty little kids or spiritual truants. In fact, where does the problem really lie?

Equippers need to be aware that spiritual truancy is rampant and cannot be resolved through fear. They need to identify the problem. Growing saints need a variety of spiritual food and the opportunity to minister.

The **entire equipping team** is needed for every saint, with a mind-set to see the whole geographical community church grow. The answer, as we've mentioned earlier, is to see more cross-pollination of the equipping gifts in the local scene. This requires more than having an occasional visiting speaker for the weekend.

SPIRITUAL PRIDE

There's also an extremely negative aspect of spiritual pride that can creep in through the "covering" teaching. Immature saints can regard themselves as spiritually superior, or more blessed, on the basis of having a certain person or organization as their "covering"

This produces a sectarian spirit of partisanship or divisiveness, separation and isolation, all of which weaken the unity of the whole church in an area. Paul saw the propensity for this trouble and begged the church:

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and judgment. *1 Cor. 1:10*

What caused the divisions?

Now I say this, that each one of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos" or "I am of Cephas" or "I am of Christ". *1 Cor. 1:12*

Which one was the correct answer? Today, many would similarly declare, "I am of the Baptists," or "I am of the Anglicans," or "I am of Christ." In future, when somebody asks you the question, "Which church do you belong to?" what will your answer be? "I am of?"

So *"that you be perfectly joined together,"* and we *"all speak the same thing"* let's be outlandishly bold and start declaring we're part of His church ... not a church.

HOUSE OF THE LORD

Alongside the covering teaching, there is also, in some quarters, a reference to "The House of the Lord", with "the house" referred to being a particular local congregation.

At best, it should be referred to as "a house of the Lord" not "the house" but that isn't the real concern. Whilst, on the surface, calling the local congregation **the** "house of the Lord" may seem harmless, we're going to deal with two areas of tradition which can come into play because of it.

First of all, in bible terms, the "house" of the Lord is where His presence dwells. Most of the House of the Lord teaching comes from the old covenant where His presence was in the Tabernacle or Temple. Ex. 30:36. However, under our new covenant He;

"does not dwell in temples made with hands". *Acts 17:24*

We've dealt with this in an earlier teaching and it's rather obvious He no longer dwells in a church building so a building cannot be His House!

WE'RE HIS HOUSE

In the New Testament, the Lord refers to His House in two ways:
First of all, He lives in the individual believer.

... do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you. *1 Cor. 6:19*

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you. *1 Cor. 3:16*

Secondly, all Christians across the entire planet corporately become His Home.

...but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are ... *Heb. 3:6*

you also, like living stones, are being built up into a spiritual house ...
1 Peter 2:5 NIV., Heb. 10:21, Eph. 2:20-21

Whilst the mature majority of us might say we're aware of these Scriptures, what can happen to us if, every week we hear constantly;

"Welcome to the House of the Lord."

“Isn't it great to be in the House of the Lord?”

Faith, good or bad, comes by hearing. The not-so-subtle impression gained by continual hearing is - the building is the house. If the building is His house, obviously, we need to come and visit every week. We come and go in and out of His presence. Because of the constant references we can now feel we are being really faithful believers because we come to His house.

This has the potential to take us right back into the old covenant thinking; when we leave His house then, we're leaving Him. Also, there can be a subtle guilt trip associated with it. If the church building is His house, as a committed Christian, you should come by His House each week to pay your respects.

The truth is, you cannot be welcomed into (or be in) His house because *you're* His house. When you leave, He leaves with you.

“This is spiritual nit-picking”, you may be thinking; yet again, it's a little tradition which, when added to others, provides an accumulative leaven effect.

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

1 Cor. 5: 6

As we've already said, faith comes by hearing, and the weekly reminders of “This is the House of the Lord,” will slowly do its work. It cuts across the major truth that He wants to restore. We are His House, His presence is with us all the time, and He wants to lead us from within. He doesn't want this truth polluted by an untruth.

FATHER OF THE HOUSE

The second challenge is once the perception that the local congregation is the House of the Lord is ingrained in someone's thinking, other household terminologies now come into play. If the congregation is considered “the” house then, by inference, each individual house has to have an individual head of the family. Even though it may not be stated, who then, can be recognized as the head of the house ... the “senior minister?” Who then, are his children ... all the church members? Obviously, the children serve the head of the house, and what the head says goes!

This can lead to a perception that the minister (the head) has the vision for all of his children. Apparently, anyone who isn't obedient to “the father” or who leaves home can be considered a rebel or prodigal son.

HIS HOUSE

On the other hand, if we view the House of the Lord scripturally as the entire Body of Christ, we automatically have just one Head of the church and One Father. This avoids any propensity to gain an inaccurate perception.

We are certainly fathered by equipping ministries whose job it is to bring us to perfection. We can then be directly led by the Father and thus, become fathers, (spiritual parents) to others as well.

Discerning the hearts and minds of those who equip believers is the issue here. Those who want to be served will exhibit a spirit of control and will have the saints serve them and their vision. Others who are servants to you, will exhibit the heart of Christ and desire to see God's vision for you fulfilled.

“And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many”.

Matt. 20:27, 28

Again, we can see how the “House of the Lord” terminology can have detrimental effects on releasing God’s people.

We’re not against structures, the body is a structure. What needs to change is the mindset. If every equipper saw themselves as, in one sense, servants or slaves and, in another sense, as parents who impart, model and lead and release, many of the present problems would be resolved. Without traditional agendas in our heads, it’s amazing how well we can then be led (by and in) the Spirit.

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the traditions of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Col. 2:8

A CHALLENGE

Obviously, there are many challenges to overcome if we want to motivate present day leaders working together as a unified church. Still, it will start with getting our hearts and motives renewed so we can build His house, not ours. Whilst there are some doubters as to God’s ability to unify His true church, an emerging church will come together, networking with each other in a way we haven’t yet seen in modern days.

There’s a need to stop putting fear and mistrust into the saints hearts, rather, to work towards putting a solid foundation of discernment into them through equipping teams. We can then have confidence that, by far, the majority of them will grow into the people of God who can submit to one another but are answerable to Him, not man or denominations.

I believe the Lord wants to be able to speak personally to every believer and assure them, “I’ve got you covered.”

FAITHFUL?

We have mentioned earlier about the concept that attendance at “His House”, equates in the minds of some believers, to being faithful.

If we study the parables of the talents (Matt 25:14-30) and minas (Luke 19:12-27) we will find that God equates faithfulness with obedience, productivity and fruitfulness.

In the parable of the talents those who used the gifts or abilities God gave them were told *“Well done good and faithful servant; you have been faithful with a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.”*

Those who had gifts and talents but simply sat on them were given the sack.

“And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matt 25:30

“And get rid of this ‘play it safe’ who won’t go out on a limb.”

Matt 25:30 MSG

Those who have received a false concept of what faithfulness really is are unwittingly sitting on their God given talents and gifts. Fear of doing something wrong and equating attendance with faithfulness, has made many “play it safe” believers.

Both the “Covering” and “House of the Lord” teachings have the propensity to keep the minds of believers centered on their corporate meetings rather than on Jesus’ kind of meetings... meeting with the Father and meeting the needs of others.

Let’s ensure that we don’t go down the track of “covering” to the point where it becomes “smothering”.

SUMMARY

1. Unscriptural teaching says that there is some kind of spiritual security by simply attending or being a member of a particular group or organization.
2. "Covering" has a pecking order or chain of command leadership model ending up at the head quarters. The Head of every man is Christ not the "head" quarters.
3. Replacing the Head for "a head" creates a sense of the need for approval by the "minister" before attempting anything. This then leads to parts of the body being paralyzed.
4. The "covering" theory has failed thousands of so called protected leaders who have fallen morally or gone astray otherwise.
5. It creates a false sense of security and can create spiritual pride.
It can also cause fear, mistrust and suspicion of other believers resulting in further division in the Body of Christ.
6. Paul didn't raise his disciples on fear but had "*confidence*" and was "*convinced*" that the sure foundation he gave them would keep them on track
7. Each Christian individually is **a** house of the Lord.
All Christians collectively are **the** house of the Lord.
8. Having a man as head of the house with "his vision" and "covering", lessens the need of the saints talking directly to the Lord, therefore effectively eroding their relationship with Him and their accountability to Him.
9. This forces believers into seeing themselves as spiritual babies who always need to be told what to do and who rely on visits to the house to prove their faithfulness. Faithfulness equates with obedience, productivity or fruitfulness...not mere attendance.
10. There is only one Head of the House and we can talk to and hear from Him anywhere, anytime. He's got us covered.

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the traditions of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.
Col. 2:8

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What was the greatest truth you discovered?
2. What was the point you least understood?
3. What can you apply in your life this week?

CHAPTER 4

PROTECTION - SAINTS OR "CHURCH"?

Those defending the covering teaching would point out that there needs to be protection within the church and we would agree with this. However, where does this protection come from and how does it operate? Is it through the church (organization) or the church (the saints)?

Obviously we have spiritual "fathers" in the church, who, like natural fathers, provide protection for their "children". However, in the natural, a child isn't protected and blessed simply because they have parents and live in a home.

Good parents supply the principles for successful living. If these principles are taught and modeled, and their children submit to and imitate them, their lives are full of blessing. Similarly, spiritual parents should exhibit and model a Christ-like nature. If we are taught by, submit to and imitate them, protection and blessing are provided.

SPIRITUAL HOLES

If, in the natural, the parents don't model or teach good table manners, for instance, the flaw will continue in the family. In the Spirit, there's only one perfect Father. The rest of us have our own strengths and weaknesses.

If we're being equipped by one elder, we must realize they'll have spiritual holes or blind spots and there'll be inevitable consequences. Many times, it's not because they don't teach truth. It's because they can't equip us in all truth. They'll have certain subjects which God has given them authority to teach but will not be anointed to teach other topics. Because of their God-given "bias", they will possibly see "their" subjects as more important than others.

In the natural, a mother and father both have special individual impartations to give to their children. If a child is not exposed to all of these there will be a degree of dysfunction.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are God's gift to the church for full impartation. Having just one or two equippers will leave a hole in your education and therefore open to error, spiritual attack, or become dysfunctional in an area in which you are supposed to minister.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

Hos. 4:6

... through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.

Prov. 11:9

This is the reason the Lord gives us a variety of equippers, it ensures all the holes are covered and blind spots revealed.

*Where there is no counsel, the people fall;
But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.*

Prov. 11:14

BROTHERS AND SISTERS

In addition to our spiritual school teachers, our older brothers and sisters in Christ, give protection and blessing through interaction, submission and interdependence. Let's look at a few areas where we are to minister to one another:

- Edify one another. Rom. 14:19
- Exhort one another. Heb. 3:13
- Stir one another to love and good works. Heb. 10:24
- Pray for one another. James 5:16
- Confess sins to one another. James 5:16
- Support the weak and feeble. 1 Thess. 5:14, 21
- Teach one another. Col. 3:16
- Love one another. Rom. 13:8
- Be submissive to one another. 1 Pet. 5:5

We can see there's no mystical protection by being a member of a church. We are protected by the teaching, encouragement, prayers and being submitted to those spiritual parents, brothers and sisters He places around us. Therefore, our total protection and growth comes from (both) the equippers and the other brothers and sisters in Christ. If we don't get the full impartation of this, how can we expect to grow into the fullness of Jesus?

CORPORATE PROTECTION

We have a few Biblical examples of local church challenges where the Body is involved, not just the senior minister.

In the first case, (1 Cor. 5:1-5) we have a man guilty and unrepentant of horrific sexual sin. The church at Corinth didn't know what action to take. Paul receives the word of the Lord for the situation. However, he doesn't institute discipline himself, and he doesn't request the elders to do so either. He asks the whole church, "*when you are gathered together ... to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh*". This was more than removal of fellowship. It implied a removal of God's protective power, to bring him to a point of repentance. The protective power of the saints, which was activated through prayer and fellowship, was removed.

Our point is the whole church (the saints) was involved in the process, not just an elder or elders.

We also have another example of corporate protection. What happens when someone wrongs you, but they either can't see it, or won't admit to it? The solution is given in Matt. 18:15-17. If a person sins against you, first of all you're to go to them and restore fellowship. If that fails, take two or more with you and, if there's still no resolution, you take it to the whole church (the saints). Although elders will be involved as part of the whole church, there's no direct mention of them handling the situation alone. The problem of protection from sin is resolved by the saints.

In both these cases of (either) sinning or being sinned against, it ultimately ended up with action being taken by church members. Is it possible the "covering" teaching has taken these corporate involvements out of the hands of the saints and placed them, inappropriately, into the hands of "the senior minister"? Whilst it's true that one of the overseers may have the Word of the Lord, as it was with Paul, the saints don't

automatically pass the problem on “up the pecking order” and expect “someone upstairs” to totally handle it.

Paul’s word from the Lord, put the ball right back in the church members’ court!

Our final example is where the early church also had a challenge when the widows were not being distributed food. Yet, the apostles realized that doing this was not part of their call.

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to ministry of the word.” Acts 6:2-4

Notice the apostles saw their role as praying for and equipping the saints. The rest of the church had to choose the men, not the twelve.

No wonder there are so many ministerial physical and mental breakdowns. God wants to release them from the administrative roles and get them back concentrating on their God-given role of equipping the saints and hearing from God.

As (either) equippers or other church members see corporate needs, leaders should let the believers make decisions and release those with good reputation, wisdom and are Spirit-led. This protects equippers from overworking and also protects the believers’ ministry from being usurped.

GREATEST PROTECTION

The best protection or covering comes from the Lord Himself.

He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge. Ps .91.4

If we’re equipped correctly, our trainers should have us hearing from the Lord. What greater security can we have if the Head is directly speaking to and guiding each part of His Body?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Prov. 3:5

Also, as we’ve mentioned previously, knowing we’re accountable directly to Him for our every word and action, is the greatest motivating force to keep us on track.

DOING OUR OWN THING?

Even with all this teaching, releasing believers to carry out their God given vision would be criticized by some believing that it can still lead to people doing what is right in their own eyes. Freedom out of control can lead to independence and this is a fair criticism. We need to address this to ensure that we maintain balance. The scripture quite often quoted is:

*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.
Judges 21:25*

We must first note that, in this Scripture, the people didn't come under any kind of rule, "*there was no king*". If we're no longer "little children" but mature into "sons", we now come under the direct kingship of Jesus.

No-one except the Lord can judge another as to their heart condition in this area. We can have one person who attends regular church meetings claiming to be in submission, yet still does their own thing during the week. We can have another who exhibits a lifestyle of loving God and loving others without regular attendance.

To whom does the scripture apply? Obviously, we're to submit to each other. However, attending regular corporate meetings is no guarantee of this. As we said earlier, we can all tick the boxes. If we're genuinely led by the Spirit, He will lead us to others who will have a genuine heart to help and support us. They will be the kind of people we can submit to with full confidence.

It's interesting to note that, if a young dog is kept in a small, fenced suburban yard, as soon as the gate is left open or there's a hole in the fence ... the dog escapes. However, if you go out to a farm where there are no fences around the house, where do you find the dog? He's on the front porch.

TWO EXTREMES

In the church we can have the two extremes. One is where we have independently minded people and the reaction of their leaders is to bring in "control". The other is where we have controlling leaders and believers who are never released because of the control.

Let's not get over-reactionary in either case, but try to guide each other back to a position where we truly understand our roles and fulfill them. In both cases, servant hearts and a desire to be Christ-like will be the key to resolve any problems.

GOING OFF TRACK

Isn't there a concern that, even if people actually claim to have a King and are left to be led by the Spirit, there's still a chance they'll go off track? The "off track" question is a fair one and there are no guarantees. As mentioned, even in Jesus' group of disciples with direct accountability, one went off track. However, we need to investigate the system God wants us to operate under to best achieve His vision so we're not sidetracked by the occasional Judas who will go off the rails in any system.

As God is restoring the church, each truth has enabled the saints to be further released to accomplish His will. We've come a long way since the dark ages but now God wants to take us another step forward. The church has been on track with what has been given to us but now He wants us to take off!

At present, many church structures could be likened to a steam train having a destination called "the church vision". If it keeps on track, it will achieve its goals and have a degree of success. In a steam engine however, there are usually just a few working flat out, driving the train, shoveling coal and guarding the rear. The rest are passengers who've paid their fare which supports the system and they're, hopefully, enjoying the ride.

This system, applied to the church, will allow people to stay on track and not go off the rails. This is because, basically, attendance, finance, and encouraging more passengers to come on board is all that's required to get to our final destination, heaven. However, huge amounts of pressure are placed on those who are involved in driving the programs.

There's a time and a place for a track and it's used in our initial "train"ing. Jesus, our role model, trained His disciples and kept them on His equipping track for three years. However, He didn't keep training and training and training. He told them it was to their advantage for Him to go because He would send a Helper so they could be led from within.

'Ministers' are to equip and disciple people, changing them from spiritual babies into mature Christians led by the Spirit.

ON TRACK OR PROPPED UP?

Those who are afraid of going off track should simply ask themselves if their present support system totally fulfills them, and leads to a daily infilling of peace and joy. On the other hand, are they like many who, during meetings, are momentarily encouraged but soon go back to a feeling of disillusionment and complacency? Have they become so institutionalized, their dependency is on church services and programs which keep them on any kind of track?

Are they going to teaching classes because it's organized for them rather than being excited and driven from within?

Do they go to meetings simply because of the expectation of other Christians and ministers?

Are they involved in programs because it's part of "the church vision" rather than something God has birthed in their hearts?

Can they share with unbelievers the personal joy of having a relationship with Jesus or can they only point to the temporary joy at the meeting?

Christians in this position should ask themselves whether their present system is supporting them or simply propping them up.

For many, the one track church vision limits them from doing what God requires. Thus, this tradition makes the Word of God of no effect in the lives of many.

If we don't have the weekly congregational support system, one might argue, that the church would degenerate into a group of people doing nothing. If that's the case, it reveals the actual spiritual level of those particular people and the true effect of years and years of spiritual information. They've obviously remained little children. We know this because they're still relying on the milk, the basic training or hearing basic teaching, week after week, year after year. In other words, they're still only school children who haven't gone on to perfection – being Jesus imitators.

Sons are led by the Spirit. Sheep know His voice.
Jesus said:

"My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me and finish His work".

John 4:34 KJV

Meat is not more spiritual information or a “deeper” word. Meat is doing the will of Him who sent them.

Sadly, there are many who, without an inward revelation and change, wouldn't survive without the present track they're on.

Praise God for the progress the church has made so far, but can we now take a further step forward toward His total restoration of His people? It's time for those who've been trained to graduate and start doing His works.

CAN THIS TAKE OFF?

Can we actually live a life free of a structured support system? Yes! However, you can only be successful in this system by being a Spirit led believer. Your equipping will have opened your eyes to new freedoms. You're empowered, not by the weekly sermon, but by a realization of what He has done for you, plus daily relationships with Him which will create an inner desire to serve Him.

You're totally convinced that He is the only answer to others' problems and you can't help but to draw others to Him. You now see the needs of others as more important than your own. As a result, the power of the Spirit now flows so naturally through you, you see gifts of the Spirit, healing, and fruit of the Spirit as a regular part of your life.

There is a price for this kind of flight, the conscious decision to become a servant and slave. The excitement, peace and joy received from the special orders He has for you creates the wind beneath your wings and lifts you higher so you look forward to your next days' outing with Him.

But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles,...
Isaiah 40:31

Do we want to get people off the rails? You bet! Eagles fly. If you stay on the track, repeating the same journey year after year, eventually you'll become bored, frustrated and unfulfilled.

In our next chapter, we'll be discussing the eagle lifestyle.

SUMMARY

1. The Lord provides us covering or protection by first of all giving us apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip us.
We need all of their input to avoid spiritual holes which can leave us open to spiritual attack, error or leave us dysfunctional in our ministry calling.
2. Secondly, He gives us other believers to encourage, care, and pray for us.
Protection through one another is appropriated by mutual interdependence and submission.
3. This means each of us understands we cannot perfect ourselves or totally fulfill our God given destiny without the help of others.
In humility we are open to be encouraged, corrected, or guided by any believer who comes with the Word of the Lord.
4. We realize that what we say to others needs to come from the Lord and not simply from off the top of our heads. It means total reliance on the Lord, hearing from Him, as a result, using that authority or His words to minister.
5. To avoid going off the rails we need an initial “train”ing track provided b
However, Jesus didn't keep endlessly training and training His disciples. He told them it was for their advantage for Him to go so that they could be led by the Holy Spirit.
6. Spirit led equippers will train their disciples for a season and then release them to be led by the Spirit.
7. Most will succeed...some will fail. Knowing that Judas went off track even under the direct leadership of Jesus should make us aware that some failures are inevitable.
8. Those who remain in training mode will eventually become institutionalized, complacent and unfulfilled.

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What was the greatest truth you discovered?
2. What was the point you least understood?
3. What can you apply in your life this week?

CHAPTER 5

FROM PET PARROTS TO EAGLES

There have been many Christians inspired and yet intrigued by the following scripture:

But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.
Isaiah 40:31

As a result there have been books written about how Christians are to be eagles and countless sermons exhorting us to soar. Nevertheless, many believers have been taught only one aspect of waiting upon the Lord.

They've prayed to receive this supernatural lift. They waited...and waited...and waited... with little or no results. After all the prayer, they're still weary and they feel their strength is not renewed. Soaring like an eagle seems to be achieved by only a handful of believers with the majority flapping about, seemingly grounded. If we know it's God's will for us to be eagles, why is it that we are not taking off? In this scripture, the word "wait" means to become one with the Lord.

Jesus said, ***"I and My Father are one."*** (*John 10:30*). This does not necessarily involve a "touchy-feely" presence. We become one with Him when we become of one mind with Him.

How then is this achieved?

JESUS THE EAGLE

Jesus is our model of how we are to achieve an eagle lifestyle. First of all, He didn't continually pray and wait for God to do everything for Him. Secondly, He wasn't waiting for the Father to inject Him with some extra supernatural energy. He had already received the power of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of His ministry. Potential power wasn't the issue...unlocking and releasing that power was.

What happened with Jesus when He waited on the Lord?

In a restaurant, a waiter waits! They wait for an order from the person they're serving. Without the order, they're ineffective and are unable to do their job. Once the order is given to them they are empowered to carry out the request. Jesus waited upon His Father and listened for His orders. Knowing what was in His Father's mind, He became one with Him.

"For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. So whatever I say is just what the Father told me to say."
John 12:49-50, NIV

"...I tell you in truth, the Son can do nothing by himself, he can only do what he sees the Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does..."
John 5:19, NIV

Faith comes by hearing a “rhema” or a live word from the Lord. When God spoke direct rhema words to Jesus, it empowered Him with the authority and faith to carry out the orders given. Day-by-day, or moment-by-moment He would be given words by God to rise up and preach the gospel, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and cast out demons. Each faith order enabled Him to renew or exchange His strength for God’s, or, in other words, to release the power of the Spirit. He was revitalized, relying on God’s seed words for strength as He soared from one person to the next. His vision was to carry out the will of the Father. He didn’t know what He was doing from one day to the next and was totally dependent on the Lord for His instructions (James 4:13-14). The Spirit of the Lord became the wind beneath His wings.

IT’S A BREEZE

“You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but have no idea where it comes from or where it’s headed next. That’s the way it is with everyone born from above by the wind of God, the Spirit of God.”
John 3:8 MSG

The Bible tells us that being Spirit led is a breeze.

Every ‘born from above’ believer can be led and lifted just as Jesus was. Those who desire to be eagles will need to have the confidence and/or trust that Jesus wants them to do what He did.

His prayer was that all believers could reach this level of maturity whereby *“they may be one just as We are one.”* But the purpose of this oneness was more far-reaching than simply being made righteous, for this Scripture goes on to say *“...that the world may believe that You sent Me.” (John 17:21-22)*. The ongoing powerful effects of being of one mind with the Lord would grab the world’s attention.

BLOWN AWAY!

The early church realized they were destined to become one with Him; to be lifted and blown by the wind of the Holy Spirit and fly just as Jesus did. They simply believed what He had told them.

“Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do will he do also and greater works than these will he do.”
John 14:12

They imitated the Lord and waited upon Him, and were so empowered through His instructions they turned the world upside down.

However, throughout the Dark Ages, the truth was plucked from the church feather-by-feather until the church became grounded. Eventually the idea that leaders, let alone followers, could duplicate the works of Jesus was considered as feasible as flying to the moon.

Restoration began with the likes of Martin Luther, and then the truths of water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit were added. Many other quills of truth have emerged and today we can say the church is covered with many theological feathers. But even with all

this new plumage of restored knowledge, many believers have not been able to soar and instead feel like they are caged.

However, the Lord wants us to be lifted and blown away by the breeze of the Holy Spirit.

PET PARROTS

Whilst it is encouraging to talk about a high flying life, some church goers have felt more like pet parrots than eagles. As we know, the owners of pet parrots gain great pleasure out of hand feeding them and showing them to others. As a result of being caged, they're confined in their activities and, because they can't enjoy the natural pleasure of flying, other things are placed in the cage to keep them amused. Some things in the cage keep them distracted and entertained. A mirror is sometimes provided which keeps them looking at themselves. They are also trained to talk, but can only repeat what their owner teaches them to say.

Those believers who feel like pet parrots are usually provided with all the care and counseling they need. They are hand-fed with well-prepared spiritual food every week. As a result, they know their bible, can repeat scriptures, but still can't fly and soar, therefore entertainment is provided. There can also be an emphasis on *self* reflection and so they're occupied with weekly meetings, instead of meeting with the Lord and meeting the needs of others.

In some cases their captivity is not a physical but a mental mindset. They've been convinced that, basically, as long as they attend every week, don't peck at the others and come along for the ongoing hand-feeding program, they are fulfilling their role. However, even with all the counseling, care and bible knowledge, they become dissatisfied. They go out for altar calls...but nothing alters. In their hearts they know that something's missing. For many, that frustration finally leads to a sense of pessimism. Their only hope of soaring is on the day they die, when they will get their heavenly wings and fly to that great aviary in the sky.

THE ONE WINGED PARROT

There is a second group of believers who, although they feel partially released, still sense they fit in the parrot category. Some pet owners keep their parrots permanently caged, but others, realizing the birds need greater freedom, allow them out. Complete liberty is, however, not an option and to stop them from leaving the house, the owners continually clip the feathers on one wing. This allows a degree of freedom but, as the bird attempts to fly, it can only flutter around in circles.

There have been some believers who've been equipped for the work of their ministry to some degree. They've been trained to move in the gifts of the Spirit, pray for the sick, but are basically confined to "in house" programs. Even with the restoration of home churches, most of the ministry takes place in the meeting. Those who sense they have a limited element of freedom will gain a degree of satisfaction. Finally, after ministering "in house" year after year, they can feel they are going around in circles and end up dizzy and exhausted.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, he gives freedom.

2 Cor. 3:17, NLT

Jesus, our eagle model, did not confine His ministry to a weekly meeting. His gifts and power were released as He went about doing good and healing all.

THE “MY PEOPLE” VISION

Because they purchased them, parrot owners have control over the future of their pet. Some spiritual leaders have seen believers as “their people” and have a planned vision for them to help build the leader’s church. God has paid a high price for **all** believers. He is the only owner and He has a specific purpose for each one. The Lord has given a vision to all leaders...to equip believers to become Jesus imitators and to be led by Him (Eph. 4:11-13).

This will need the impartation of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, not just the one leader struggling to fully equip believers. Having an equipping team will also help remove the old traditional “my people” syndrome.

Unfortunately in the past, some in traditional church leadership have concentrated on their vision of “in house” ministry and have not received the revelation of the present “eagle truths”. Reaching the lost is advocated but having as many people as possible attend services or home church meetings has been the ultimate goal.

EAGLE CHURCHES

In an “eagle church”, having a huge bird cage or aviary is not the goal. The future leaders who truly want to imitate Jesus just want to see their fledglings soar. How do they do this?

In the natural, eagles provide two essential chick-rearing principles.

First of all, they do provide an initial environment of protection and care. They also provide fresh food for a period of time, until the eaglets are ready to leave the nest. (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Secondly, they are examples of what it is to be an eagle. The babies learn through observation of their parents what their future holds for them. They have no doubt that they are destined to soar, search for their own food and provide for their own family one day.

Jesus was the ultimate example of the eagle parent. He fed His fledglings fresh spiritual food daily. He demonstrated how to wait upon the Father – a waiting which enabled Him to rise to the occasion. He told them that they were expected to do what He did (John 14:12).

After modeling and feeding for some time, He gave them an opportunity to practise, using both specific and general orders. As He was walking on water, He demonstrated that Peter also could imitate Him by obeying a specific order, “Come!”

He also sent them out on practice flights with a general command to preach the gospel. They were so excited with this short, uplifting trip they said, ***“Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name.” (Luke 10:17)***

Feeding, modeling and practice, however, was only for a season. For Jesus it was three years. For the apostle Paul, it varied from several months to two or three years.

Eagle leaders are Jesus imitators. They give fresh food to their young but are also to be examples of a Spirit led life. They are able to receive words of faith as they wait upon the Lord and are to be models of this high flying kind of living.

The previous model of leadership in some cases has been the “in house” concept, with preaching and teaching being perceived as the mark of a great man or woman of God. Obviously teaching Scripture is vital, but unless the Spirit-led life is modeled, believers may gain the impression that “real” ministry is predominantly about imparting bible knowledge. Their wings remain clipped because they’re not taught the Jesus model of relationship whereby they can rely on the direct leading of the Lord.

The Lord is presently ruffling some feathers, and stirring up an emerging group of leaders to go to greater heights and demonstrate the Spirit led life.

For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.

1 Cor. 4:20

EMPTYING THE NEST

In the natural, if a mature eaglet is unsure about taking a leap of faith and beginning to fly, the parents lovingly remove all the soft lining in the nest. They also refuse to feed it any more and make staying in the nest an uncomfortable option.

Isn't this what Jesus did with His young? When He told them that He was going to leave them to fly by themselves, they thought of themselves as being abandoned orphans (John 14:18).

He removed the comfort of depending directly on Him, stopped His feeding program and told them it was to their advantage to be on their own because the Holy Spirit would come (John 16:17). They now had to take a leap of faith and depend on a word from the Spirit being the wind beneath their wings. They had to feed themselves with seeds of faith from the Holy Spirit.

The same detachment process had to happen to the first disciples of the apostles. After learning the apostles' doctrine, which were basically the teachings in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the disciples were forced out of their comfort zone.

At the time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

Acts 8:1,4

The disciples of the apostles were also tipped out of the nest.

By today's standards, these would be considered baby Christians. However, after they were scattered they found their wings. They had obviously learned from the apostles to fly by being led by the Spirit. Having been forced out of the nest with no apostles to turn to, they looked to the Lord and, as a result, became part of the church that turned the world upside down.

Is this emptying the nest principle applied in our equipping mindsets today? Could this be a major reason we are not seeing a move of the Spirit in most western countries?

In the past, pet parrot churches, with little understanding of releasing, do the opposite. Many seem to make their church more and more comfortable, to encourage their followers to keep coming back. Returning to the nest each week is considered a vital part of a believer's ministry. The perception gained is that they still need to receive more and more prepared hand feeding...for the rest of their lives. In some cases they're taught on the dangers of flying the Spirit led life and in other cases that it's actually rebellious.

Mature eagles don't need basic, hand-fed, continual weekly messages. They're now strengthened by being able to get their own spiritual food by the leading of the Spirit from their bibles, other eagles, or through hearing directly from the Lord.

Spiritual eagles are satisfied not by the milk but by meat.

Jesus said:

“My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me.”

John 4:34, KJV

The eagles no longer have to take non-believers to meetings, but have been equipped to lead them to the Lord and so have their own eaglets. As a result, they fulfill the words of Isaiah, renewing their strength and not fainting or growing weary.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Some may be concerned at the freedom and perceived independence we are encouraging here. They would remind us of the need for the Body of Christ to come together (Heb. 10:25).

Relationships are extremely vital in this high flying life.

Jesus modeled the “eagle church” perfectly for us. He gathered His disciples for equipping. After being a good spiritual parent, He released His church of disciples to go out in pairs and start their own spiritual families.

He also reminded us that eagles do congregate.

“Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.”

Luke 17:37

When food is available, natural eagles gather together for a feed. In the Old Testament, God's people met in family homes and came together for great feasts. In the New Testament, they gathered together as a Body for both natural and spiritual food. They met in the Temple (initially) to receive the basic truths and then had love feasts in their homes where relationships were built over meals.

So continuing daily in one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.

Acts 2:46

There are so many scriptures that refer to the ministry to “one another”. Any believer will realize the need to “feed” from one another. This is part of their eagle ministry. After we receive initial milk teaching, we need exhorting, comforting and stirring one another to sustain an eagle lifestyle.

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another...

Heb. 10:24-25

However, mature spiritual eagles flock together because they realize they have a need to give and receive from “one another”...not just hearing from the same one every week. What's the old saying? Birds of a feather flock together!

THE DOWN SIDE

As the believer's baby down grows into full feathers, there will be problems as these new truths are restored. The negative side is that there will be basically three groups of believers who will not be able to extend their wings.

1. Those who have a caged mentality.
2. Those who have an isolation mindset.
3. Those who form independent small groups.

1. CAGED MENTALITY

If a pet parrot has been confined for some time and is dependent on its owner's care and hand feeding, it has become institutionalized. If you take the bird out of the security of its cage, it becomes fearful and will instinctively want to go back to its former confinement into what it considers a safe environment.

Some church leaders have done so much for believers in caring for and organizing them that they've become dependent on what the church organization provides. They see the Sunday congregation as the centre of their Christian life.

Unwittingly, some have become spiritually institutionalized and the freedom of living the Spirit-led "eagle life" – of being released as the early church was – can be considered too radical and frightening. As a result, the eagle truths can be too confronting and it's easier and safer to return to the confinement and "covering" to which they have grown accustomed.

Escaping Parrots

At the moment there are many Christians who are considered by some to have "left the church" because they no longer attend a regular traditional church meeting.

There are really two lines of thought here: Those who attend regularly may consider them as backsliders or rebellious. Those leaving may consider themselves as breaking free from captivity.

George Barna, a Christian statistician in the U.S.A. and author of many books including "Revolution" has spoken about the millions that are leaving the established church in that country. Initially, he questioned the motive of those departing but now he considers it a move of God.

The fruit of rebellion and backsliding people is that there is no longer a need for God in their lives. However, there are those who remain dependent on the Lord, who desire to please Him, and simply want to soar as eagles. For these, there are some additional issues to consider.

2. ISOLATION MINDSET

If a pet parrot does escape and gets outside the house, it faces immediate dangers. Because it has always been hand-fed, it has little idea of how to feed or protect itself and certainly is not totally proficient in flying.

This is a danger for some Christians who've released themselves from traditional fellowship. They have biblical theory, but in practical terms many don't have an intimate relationship with the Lord and are not led by the Spirit in ministering to others. After some time they will find their spiritual energy or enthusiasm waning and draining.

Some of these 'escapees' have been so hurt or disappointed by their former confinement or control that they are not willing to meet with other believers. They remain alone and as yet, because of their former experiences, are not willing to submit to others. These need to be encouraged and prayed for, because they still do need the help of others to be able to accomplish their real potential.

3. INDEPENDENT SMALL GROUPS

There are others who do realize the need to support "one another" and who meet together in small groups in homes. However, because of their mistrust caused by their former experiences, they're wary of other parts of the Body and even other house churches. They remain independent but alive, feeding on God's word but, in many cases, they haven't been equipped to hear from the Lord or to win the lost without the help of a "minister". Many realize something is still missing because they're unable to rise up to the potential they know is there.

Those who want to fulfill their greatest potential will understand the need to network with others so that the equippers, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, can bring them and any future baby believers to full maturity (Eph. 4:11-13). Otherwise, like those in home groups in traditional churches, they will find themselves seemingly going around in circles. They may be free from a system of control but not truly released to fill their God given destiny.

LIBERTY OR LEGALISM

The apostle Paul also wrote to the Galatians, whom he considered had gone back into captivity. Anything less than a Spirit-led life was considered by him to be a form of bondage.

But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under law.

Gal. 5:18

If you put it around the other way it says, *But if you are not led by the Spirit you are under law.*

God wants to release every believer to be totally free to be led by Him.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has set us free, and do not be entangled with the yoke of bondage.

Gal. 5:1

GREATER MOTIVATION

To help some who need to overcome their previous disappointments, hurts and suspicions which, in some cases have led to apathy, there needs to be a Biblical motivation.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

1 John 4:18

First of all, we must understand that the Lord purchased us and He is now our owner. His purpose for paying that high price of His death was to enable us to grow to be

imitators of His Son. His prayer *“that they may be one just as We are one”* is ongoing. Anything less than fulfilling the destiny He planned for us would only bring our Father disappointment.

Secondly, we must realize that, through our relationship with Him, we can release His love and power and change the lives of others. We can turn our cities upside down and lead exciting lives.

Thirdly, surely none of us wants to stay bored or unfulfilled. We can stay within the confines of “the house”, whether it is a large church, a house church or our own home. Even though it may be relatively comfortable, it will never be totally satisfying.

A desire to be filled with His continuous peace and joy can be a final motivating force.

THE COST

Sometimes eagles grow disorderly feathers which actually impede their flying ability. Naturally they pluck them out. Believers who have grown feathers of erroneous thinking because of misguided teaching will find their momentum hampered. These entrenched mindsets will need to be discarded and new truth allowed to grow in their place.

...let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.

Rom. 12:2, NLT

As well, flying does take some exertion. It's much easier to sit on a perch than to take off. Before you can get the wind beneath your wings and soar you need to put in some time and effort. This doesn't mean you're to get into a flap and attend more meetings, but spend more of your week meeting with Him, just as Jesus did.

“The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He awakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear like one who is being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious, I have not drawn back.”

Isaiah 50.4-5, NIV

The Lord has told us that every believer is capable of hearing His personal voice and following His instructions (John 10:3-4). Like Him, we can learn to do this. Morning by morning we can be a student being taught what to say to the weary.

Let's not draw back into a previous caged or confined mentality but, instead, learn how to have an “instructed tongue” which will release us into the full, potent eagle ministry He has destined for us.

And you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.... Therefore if the Son makes you free you shall be free indeed.

John 8:32, 36

SUMMARY

1. Jesus waited upon the Lord for his orders. This gave Him the seeds of faith and authority to mount up like an eagle.
2. He wants us to be of one mind with Him and live a high flying lifestyle. However, some believers feel more like pet parrots than eagles.
3. Pet parrots don't fly like eagles, they're caged, hand fed and can only say what their owners have taught them to say. Because they can't be fulfilled by flying, other things to amuse them are placed in their cage.
4. Other parrots are given partial freedom, have one wing clipped but are confined to in-house activity.
5. Eagle leaders give initial feeding and demonstrate the freedom of a Spirit led life. They provide out of the nest training flights. For those who are fearful of flying, the hand feeding ceases and the nest is made uncomfortable.
6. Parrot leaders make the nest larger and more comfortable and teach the dangers of flying.
7. If you take a parrot out of its cage, it will fearfully try to get back in. Those believers who have been captivated by services will need some mind renewal Before overcoming the fear of the freedom of a Spirit led life.
8. Those previously caged believers who purposely break free from an institutionalized lifestyle will also need to learn how to fly and provide for themselves. Therefore they still need to meet with equippers and other believers.
9. The Lord is our owner and He paid an incredible price so we could be free to soar as He did. Let's not disappoint Him.
10. Its easier to perch in a church or in your own home and do nothing. Flying takes an effort. Meeting with and hearing from Him daily and encouragement from other eagles will provide the wind beneath your wings.

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What was the greatest truth you discovered?
2. What was the point you least understood?
3. What can you apply in your life this week?