

# The Reformation Road

## Radical Renewal in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church

### Chapter One – “The Challenge Before Us”

*“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*

(Matthew 7:13-14)

Traditionally we have read Matthew 7:13-14, in which Jesus referred to two opposing gates and paths, as contrasting the way of the world with the way of salvation. We often assume His remarks are directed towards unbelievers. But studying the larger context of Jesus’ words reveals to us that this assumption may be incorrect! Though multitudes followed Jesus wherever He went, on this particular day He left them and went up on a mountain. His disciples then joined Him there and He began to teach them in a message we often call “the Sermon on the Mount.” What He shared with them that day is recorded in Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7. Jesus’ message is timeless, and while directed to the followers of His own day, it is applicable to those of the present day as well. His words are still “spirit and life”<sup>a</sup> to those who seek Him and endeavor to follow Him more closely.

Dave and I have come to see in recent years that this truth about the two paths has both an individual and a corporate application. Individually, we all face daily decisions that will lead toward spiritual life or toward spiritual death.<sup>b</sup> The decisions we make which result in spiritual death usually involve our taking the easy way out or the path of least resistance. This path is wide and smooth. It does not cost us much to choose the wide path. Choosing the way leading to spiritual life, however, often engenders a sacrifice of ourselves or our comfort in some way. This path, by contrast, is often narrower and more difficult. We also face choices on a *corporate* level that can take us down the broad path of decay and death or the narrow, difficult path leading to deeper and more abundant life. This corporate entity, of which all true Christians are a part, is described in the New Testament as the Body of Christ or His Church. The corporate Body of Christ is composed of many individuals in the same way a physical body is made up of individual cells that all work together to enable the body to live, move and grow. As Jesus’ followers, we are *each* part of the Body, His Church, and we *each* have a part to play in choosing which of the two paths the Church will take.

### A Vision of Two Paths

Some time ago, I was standing in a service worshipping the Lord when suddenly He began to unfold a vision before me. In this vision, I found myself standing on a path half way up a hillside, facing a signpost at a fork in the trail. It signified that a path went to the left and another path went to the right. Though I tried hard, I could not read what was on either sign.

I then looked to the left and saw that that this wide, even and well-traveled path meandered gently down the hill to a lovely, inviting little village. I could see that the path ended there. The village was attractive and brightly colored, occupying a place on the shore right next to a sparkling blue sea. It was a picture-postcard kind of place. It looked fun as well! I could see a Ferris wheel peeking over the rooftops, and I could almost imagine the laughter of its passengers as they swooped down and

around, over and over again. The village was quite well-defined and looked very reassuring and secure. It was very clear what was part of the village and what was not. Everything was clearly laid out in a very orderly and systematic way. There would be no worries about taking a wrong turn there!

Then I looked to the right and I saw a narrow, winding goat track leading uphill and disappearing over the crest. It looked dusty, rocky and difficult – terribly uninviting to say the least! Furthermore, I could not see where it went since it disappeared over the top of the hill. As I contemplated which path to take, I thought to myself, “Well, this is a no-brainer! If I go to the left, it is an easy walk down the hill. It looks attractive and fun, I can see what I am getting into and there are lots of people down there to keep me company. It looks like a nice place to settle and stay for a while. Whereas if I go to the right, it is a very difficult-looking path – if one could even call it that – and I have no idea where it goes or what is over the top of the hill. It also looks very lonely because I see few other people in that direction. Who in their right mind would choose that path?” And yet, as I stood there indecisively, I felt the tug of the Holy Spirit upon my heart whispering, “Take the narrow way.” So with a longing look once more at the pretty little village down by the seashore, I turned to the right and began to slowly ascend the hill.

When I finally reached the top, I could see that the path went on for as far as the eye could see, up and down, through many valleys and over many hills. It never stopped anywhere as the other path had. It just continued. Further there was no definition to it – no structures or even trees to hang onto, just the rocky goat track winding through the hillsides. I felt vulnerable and insecure because I could not see where the path was taking me. Also, it was such a wide-open place that I felt afraid. It would be so easy to take a wrong turn, get off the path and get lost! I wanted a wall or a roadway or even some trees in the distance to guide me. I wanted a place to hang my hat, a place to rest and camp, a place with a multitude of people surrounding me. But the Holy Spirit compelled me to move on, down the lonely, narrow path, content with the journey as an end in itself, and Him as my primary traveling companion.

The decision between two paths is not a new one. Abram and Lot parted ways when the land could not support their herds.<sup>c</sup> Lot chose the well-watered plains, leaving Abram to take the least inviting path. We all know the resulting disaster in Lot’s life as he settled in the land of Sodom! We also know the blessing that followed Abram who became the “Father of Nations” as he took the more difficult and less favorable road.

In this vision of the two paths, I sensed quite clearly as I stood looking at the signpost that the two opposing pathways represented two directions we can take regarding “church”. In the context of church life, the wide path down to the pretty seaside village represents the way of religion, tradition, and institutionalism. It is a well-worn and familiar path to us all. Its *destination* is also one with which we are comfortable and familiar. For most of us, regardless of whether we call ourselves liturgical, evangelical, pentecostal or charismatic, our entire Christian walk has been spent walking this path and camped in the pretty, seaside village at the end of it. Correspondingly, the narrow, uphill path represents a counterculture concept of church life that leads straight into the unknown! We don’t know where we are going because we have not trod this path before. It has no final destination, no point at which we can say “we have arrived” or “this is it”. There are no clear landmarks, only the Holy Spirit to guide us. This pathway entails a journey characterized by revelation, repentance, reformation and *even spiritual revolution* in church life, a prospect that is unsettling and uncomfortable to most of us.

## Time For a Spiritual Overhaul

We have been sharing with people the need for such a revolution in the Church for some time, and they sometimes look at us askance when we used the term. It undoubtedly conjures pictures of domestic terrorism, bombs, and carnage in their minds. Allow us to share something very interesting, however. One meaning of the word *revolution*, according to Webster's New World Dictionary, is "complete change". After living and ministering in the Church world for almost three decades, the two of us have come to the conclusion that complete change is indeed needed if we are to see the Body of Christ corporately become all that God has ordained us to be. In the book of Acts, we see that the entire known world of that day was turned upside down by a handful of believers.<sup>d</sup> The *dunamis* power of the Holy Spirit was unleashed through the Church like radioactivity from an atomic bomb, hugely impacting the Middle East, as well as eastern and western Europe within a matter of decades. Yet, in this day and age, the Church is more often than not irrelevant, powerless, and ineffective. All too often, we are experiencing and walking in only a *form* of godliness but not the transforming and earth-shaking power of His Holy Spirit within us. We believe that even those segments of the Body of Christ which seem to be alive, thriving and making a difference are still falling far short of what the Lord has purposed for us.

► **While we must each take individual responsibility for our walk with the Lord, it has become increasingly clear that the present Church system must shoulder some of the responsibility for this state of affairs.**

It is a system that has robbed its people, effectively blocking divine life from infusing their growth and corporate expression, leaving an empty shell of religious tradition, man-made structure and institutional thinking. This system often hinders, rather than helps, God's people to be the living demonstration of Jesus Christ in this world that we are called to be. A complete overhaul of the system is needed. We believe the Holy Spirit is moving at this time in history to bring just such an overhaul.

Those of us who spend a great deal of time traveling from one place to another by automobile are able to recognize when our vehicles need an overhaul. When we attempt to accelerate, but find little power at our disposal, we have an inkling that something is wrong. When we try to turn the steering wheel and the response is sluggish, we become aware that there might be a problem. When the vehicle rattles and chugs along leaving a trail of black smoke in its wake, we *know* it is time to take it to a master mechanic and let the expert do an overhaul. The Church has been limping along for quite some time. We suggest it is long overdue for us to present ourselves and our way of doing things to the Master for His overhaul.

► **We need to submit our hearts, our lives, our thinking, our concepts, our methods, our strategies, and even our goals to Him in a fresh way, allowing Him to examine and adjust every component of our lives and churches.**

## A Return to Seeking and Searching

Dave and I readily admit that we are dissatisfied with the status quo. Increasingly, we are discovering that we are not alone in this, and that God is bringing a divine dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs throughout His Body worldwide. There is arising a passionate desire for more

of God's presence and power in our midst, as we cry out to Him for a better understanding of His mind and heart where the Church is concerned. What is His plan and purpose for the Church *and* how does He want to fulfill it? As we examine these questions together in this book, we suggest preliminarily that our process of discovery has previously been hindered in the Church world by our tendency to believe we *already* understand God's plan and strategy! To discover the answers to these questions, we *must* be willing to set aside what we have thought, taught, and assumed to be true in the past. It also requires that we become seekers of God again, submitted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in every aspect of our lives and ministries. Are we willing?

► **We suggest that it is time for us all to get real and honest with one another, and allow humility to guide us into a new realm of experiencing and releasing the presence of God in our life together.**

In this book, we endeavor to share some of the questions we have had as leaders in the Body of Christ, issues with which we have wrestled, and conclusions we have drawn. We hope that our doing so will bring reassurance to those who are already questioning, and challenge to those who are not! Our fundamental goal is to stir and encourage the Church to seek the Lord more fervently regarding His plan and purpose for us as a corporate entity. Some of the things we share may be troubling to those who have assumed that the present Church system is God-directed or the best it can be. Our objective, however, is not to shock, offend, or foster confusion. It is very simply to challenge our corporate thinking, concepts and methods in hopes that it will spark or catalyze a vision for something more and a willingness to seek until we find it.

► **We will not seek God for more of what the Church is meant to be if we assume that Church life as we now know it is the fulfillment of His plan and purpose.**

Dave remembers once misplacing his car keys. As he searched for them, whispering a short, "Lord, please help me find my keys," kind of prayer, he heard the Holy Spirit ask him, "When are you going to quit looking for them?" He responded, "Well, as soon as I find them!" The Holy Spirit then began to explain to Dave that this is a serious problem in the Body of Christ - we stop searching as soon as we *think* we have found what we are looking for! His word to us is, "seek, and you shall find."<sup>e</sup> Unfortunately, once we think we have "found", we stop seeking. At that point, we begin to limit the ability of the Holy Spirit in our lives to guide us into all truth and bring new and fresh revelation of God's mind and heart.

We will be the first to admit that we have more questions than answers. In many ways, we can see clearly where the problems are, where the Church is failing, where we are missing God's heart and plan, but we do not yet see the solutions with clarity or completeness. As we share bits and pieces of our own journey in this book, we hope others will be stimulated to look at "church" from a fresh perspective and to allow the Lord to bring a rearrangement in their thinking also. As we corporately join together in this endeavor, we believe the guidance from the Lord *will* come, along with a fresh impartation of His life and empowerment to His precious Body.

A caution may be in order here, however. Much of our seeking and searching in the past has been for more of, or a rearrangement of, the same. We have sought for new formulas, different growth strategies, and better ways of doing the same old thing with the same old mindsets to achieve the same old objectives. Often our goal in seeking has not been for truth or harmony with the Spirit of God but rather to better achieve or succeed in what we believe we are expected to do. Within our

institutionalized framework of Church as we know it, we have only been trading one bolt or beam for another ...

► **Perhaps the Lord wants to dismantle the structure man has built, so that we will finally allow Him to build His Church the way He intended in the beginning.**

Some are attempting to promote models that they feel are more in line with God's plan for the Church than the average traditional church of today. Many of these models simply trade one institutional framework for another. Other models may well be less institutional and more closely demonstrate God's heart and purposes. However, until the Lord is able to challenge us, show us the real motivations of our hearts and expose the worldly concepts out of which we are operating, we will view every other model as simply another formula, another strategy or another way to achieve "success". We will attempt to use and implement new models as a means to an end, and in doing so, will once again miss the mark! Put another way, we must allow God to lay the axe to the root of our underlying mission, motives and mindsets first.

► **Real change must take place in our hearts before transformation will happen in our corporate expression, regardless of our methodology!**

## Revelation and Repentance - Keys to Reformation and Change

One of Jesus' primary messages throughout the gospel accounts was a call to "repent". The word translated "repent" in the New Testament is the Greek word *metanoeo*. It literally means "change your mind" or "change the way you think." The apostle Paul tells us we are transformed by the renewing of our minds<sup>f</sup> and mention is made several times in the New Testament of having the mind of Christ.<sup>g</sup> Our thinking must completely change before we can understand God's heart and mind and the things of His kingdom. The problem often times is that our thinking has been changed a *little*, but not enough. Most of us have seen how thinking like the world has not matched God's heart but we have not seen how thinking like the *church* often does not match His heart either! It may come as a shock to many that we can be born again, filled with the Spirit, fervent in our desire to serve the Lord, and still be thinking contrary to Him!

Let us cite a biblical example. There was a very fervent group of men in Jesus' day who were characterized by a desire to see the kingdom of God established. They were studious of the Scriptures, very zealous in observing God's commandments, devout in their devotions, and fervent in their church attendance. They were completely sincere in their attempts to follow God and be pleasing to Him. Who were they? The Pharisees! Jesus' appraisal of their fervency and their zealotry to uphold the things of God was that they were, "...of your father the devil."<sup>h</sup> It is possible to be fervent and sincere in our religious devotion, while unwittingly resisting the things of God.

► **Underlying a Church system that needs reform is carnal human thinking that does not match the mind of Christ or our heavenly Father's plans and purposes.**

The key to transformation in the Church is *revelation* (from the Greek word *apokalupsis* meaning an uncovering or unveiling) from the Holy Spirit that brings *repentance*, a change in our thinking. Jesus touched on our neediness in Luke 4:18. Here, He quoted from the book of Isaiah and said,

*"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed"*

This passage in the fourth chapter of Luke is another one that we often assume is meant for the unsaved, i.e. for the world who does not know Jesus. However, the ministry of Jesus is to the Church as well as for the lost! There is still much of the gospel, or "good news", that we do not yet comprehend or understand. Many of us have hearts that remain broken by the hurts and traumas of the past. We, too, can be captive, oppressed and blind. Jesus' admonition to the Laoedicean church certainly bears this out. He described these believers as "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked."<sup>1</sup>

The sad thing about the Laoedicean church is that these Christians thought they had it all together. More often than not, so do we! In our spiritual blindness, we desperately need the Sovereign Lord to spit in the dust and put salve upon our eyes that we might receive revelation of our own blindness, first of all, then revelation of His thinking and ways. Only then will we see the need to repent or change the way we think. Only then will we come to Him, crying out for His cleansing, renewing, restoring and transforming power to work in every part of our lives, individually and corporately. We need His power to be at work in the midst of church life and the whole Church system as well as in our personal lives. Everything we are and everything we do as the Church must be permeated by this revelation and repentance if we are *ever* to become the manifestation of His glory that God intended us to be, and if we are ever to truly impact the lost world around us with His love and saving grace!

## **A Need for Honest Self-Examination**

Jesus said something very interesting to the religious leaders around Him one day. He told them that Isaiah had prophesied of them, saying, "*This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*"<sup>j</sup> We often think the religious leaders of Jesus' day were sleazy, carnal, immoral, self-serving and very different from ourselves, but is that really true? Maybe we are more like them than we would like to believe. How much of what we teach and call biblical "truth" is really tradition or the commandments of men?

**► How much of our present Church system is the product of human ideas, the spirit of the world, misinterpretation of Scripture and the gradual encroachment of institutionalism?**

How much of it entails concepts that seem good and right, but are only serving to bring greater lifelessness? The Scriptures share with us that there *is* a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.<sup>k</sup> How much of what we *think* is biblical in regards to church meetings, leadership, discipleship, worship, and so forth actually have a historical source *outside* of the Scriptures? What things have we considered to be a necessary part of "real church" which are actually in opposition to the Spirit of God? To what degree is our motivation in honoring and defending the present religious system really self-serving?

## **God is Raising Up Reformers**

We see the Holy Spirit moving and working in the midst of the Body of Christ in this season to bring a holy dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs in the Church. We hear a call being

sounded in this hour to the people of God to arise from complacency and our tendency to just “go with the flow”, doing what we have always done in the same way we have always done it. He is sounding a call to those who will respond with boldness and the courage to question and stand against the encroaching tide of institutionalism, religiosity, secular thinking and human wisdom within the Church system. Very little will change until the call is answered.

Do you have a heartfelt desire to see change within the Church? Do you long to see the Church become more effective, more powerful, more alive, more relevant, more loving, more mature, more unified in her diversity, more mobilized, more healed and restored, more exciting, more safe, more honest and more real? Perhaps it is the Holy Spirit stirring your heart in this regard. Perhaps it is God Himself who has planted this desire in your heart, that you might be a vessel through whom He can work to bring transformation and change. Perhaps *you*, dearest brother or sister, are called to be a modern-day Reformer!

### **Seek, Submit and Respond – to Him!**

It is our fervent prayer that you will read this book with an open mind and heart, and that you will go to the Lord and *ask Him* about what is shared here. We ask that you would not accept anything we share without prayerfully submitting it to the Lord and apart from digging into the Word of God for yourselves. He is calling us all to be like the diligent Bereans who, upon hearing what was shared by Paul and Silas, “*searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*”<sup>1</sup>

We pray that you will seek the Lord concerning these things not only with a heart submitted to Him, but also with a *whole* heart. He promised that we would find Him, and by extension discover His heart, mind, will and purposes for ourselves, if we would only seek Him with *all* of our hearts.<sup>m</sup> We beg of you - don't be half-hearted!

It is also our prayer that you will *respond* to whatever the Lord might speak to your heart through this book. So often, we are hearers of the Word only,<sup>n</sup> content to acknowledge that God has given our hearts a nudge, but too apathetic or fearful to actually move. Yet Jesus said that responding in obedience to Him was one evidence of our love for Him – “*If you love Me, keep My commandments.*”<sup>o</sup> Allow His love to be perfected in you, dear ones. Humbly respond to His leading with a whole heart and discover the new life and liberty He has waiting for you! The Body of Christ will be that much richer for it.

### **Food for Thought**

1. In what way does your experience of “church” provide security for you? How might you be using it as a substitute for the security the Lord wants to provide through trust in Him?
2. What is the biggest hindrance you face in seeking more of God, His heart and His purposes? What is the biblical prescription for addressing this hindrance?
3. What would concern you the most about being a modern-day Reformer? Why?

- <sup>a</sup> (John 6:63)
- <sup>b</sup> (Deuteronomy 30:19; Proverbs 18:21)
- <sup>c</sup> (see Genesis 13)
- <sup>d</sup> (Acts 17:6)
- <sup>e</sup> (Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9)
- <sup>f</sup> (Romans 12:2)
- <sup>g</sup> (1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5)
- <sup>h</sup> (John 8:44)
- <sup>i</sup> (Revelation 3:17-19)
- <sup>j</sup> (Mark 7:6-7)
- <sup>k</sup> (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25)
- <sup>l</sup> (Acts 17:11)
- <sup>m</sup> (Jeremiah 29:13)
- <sup>n</sup> (James 1:21-25)
- <sup>o</sup> (John 14:15)