

Apostolic Iron

Online Periodical

2007 - Issue 3

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ARE WE A PASSIONLESS CHURCH?

In 1974, as a 28 year old pastor, I vividly remember being called to the house of Mr. Coffin. His daughter, who had been raised Catholic, had recently been baptized in name of Jesus and filled with the Holy Ghost in our church. With some trepidation over what he would say, I entered his home. After being seated at his table, he asked me, "Do I understand correctly from my daughter that you preach that if a person has not been baptized by immersion in water in name of Jesus and filled with the Holy Ghost speaking with tongues that they will not be saved?" I gulped and said, "Yes, Sir." He then asked me, "Do you know what this means?" I said, "I am not sure." Mr. Coffin then said to me, "It means that if you are going to preach a doctrine such as this, then you must assume the responsibility to ensure that EVERY person has it communicated to them, so that they are given the opportunity to make a choice to believe it or not; OR, YOU DO NOT HAVE A RIGHT TO PREACH SUCH A DOCTRINE." Mr. Coffin was right. In over 38 years in the ministry, I have yet to hear anyone present the dilemma of the Church and its ministers more clearly and factually.

Mr. Coffin presented me with some very discomforting reasoning that I could not ignore and continue to believe that I was faithfully fulfilling the Great Commission. The enemy has certainly "come in like a flood" in "blinding the minds of them which believe not," but are we as equally committed to our commissioned role to bring "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ" to the blind? Do we possess the integrity to bear the standard of salvation that the Spirit is lifting up, or are we handling the Word of God deceitfully in pursuit of goals far subordinate to the saving of souls? We need to whole heartedly "examine ourselves" to see whether the business of our faith really measures up to our being "in the faith." We need to *prove* [recognize as genuine after examination] our own selves worthy, not to be saved, but to rightfully bear the standard of the gospel.

A while ago people were asking "What would Jesus do?" as they contemplated their response to those things which life brought their way. A more vital application to us is, "What would Jesus do?" if He sat in one of our business-as-usual church services or divisive conference sessions and took assessment of our reasons for inaction in reaching this lost world. Would we want Him to "discern the thoughts and intents of our hearts?" Because Jesus' last words before ascending into heaven were His most urgent and crucial charge to the redeemed, we who have "received the power" after receiving the Holy Ghost should seriously consider how we are handling and what we are producing with that power.

Someone far greater than a Catholic man named Coffin is asking the Church this ultimate question: do we have a right to preach Acts 2:38 as the only saving message and not do everything possible to give the world a chance to hear it and be saved? Do we honestly believe that standing in the safe cocoon of our pulpits and preaching that the world will be lost if they do not obey

our gospel is in any way related to fulfilling the Great Commission? Can we be saved, having the truth and withholding it from the world, while we consume our energies and each other by "biting and devouring" one another over issues (Galatians 5:15)? **We justify ourselves by saying that the world does not want what we have. But the real truth is they DO NOT KNOW what we have. Most of them do not know that we and this gospel message even exist!**

Sadly, we spend most of our time preaching each other into hell, rather than preaching the world out of it. We shamefully waste hours, days, and weeks wrangling over who is going to captain the lifeboat and who is going to be its navigator, while cries for help from those perishing in the storm-tossed seas of life go unheeded and un-answered. We the self-centered and self-possessed spend countless hours in confabs and conferences plotting the means to successfully promote our agenda, while we have NO TIME to spend discussing how to fulfill our God-given and God-ordained responsibility to take the gospel to the world. Yet, the Lord implores us to, "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die" (Psalms 79:11). What will be our end if we do not answer His cry to hear and respond to the sighs and cries of the prisoners of sin?

What is missing in us and in our walk with God? Why are we not doing more to participate with Jesus in His calling and mission? While we claim to have the Holy Ghost, could it be that in truth we do not have the same spirit that Jesus had? What was His spirit? He had a focused, purposed, committed, selfless, compassionate, and zealous spirit that drove Him internally to give Himself without reservation to REACH THE LOST, regardless of the personal cost! I thought that being a Christian meant being "Christ-like." But, apparently it does not mean that anymore. Where are those who have the same spirit as Christ? The lost of this generation want to know!

"We spend most of our time preaching each other into hell, rather than preaching the world out of it."

DOES THE SIGHT OF THE LOST MULTITUDES MOVE YOU? IT MOVED JESUS!

Matthew 9:35-38

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Then saith he unto his disciples, **The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;**

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

Webster's defines *compassion* as, "sorrow for the sufferings or trouble of another or others, accompanied by an urge to help or spare." For the world to have any chance of being saved, the Church must come to the understanding that it is not possible to have "compassion" upon the lost until we first have "passion" to see them saved. The word *compassion* is made up of two words, "com" (with) and "passion." *Compassion* is what we do "with passion," which is to help. If we do not have Christ's zeal (passion) for reaching the lost, then we cannot be moved with His compassion to act. If these qualities are either absent or secondary in our lives, then our motives for being involved with the work of God are not Christ's motives. Christ NEVER called us to "grow" a church or build a crowd. He called us to seek and to save the lost. In the Lord's Kingdom, our motives are as important to God as the work we do with Him. **Our motives determine how effectively and unselfishly we are motivated to be involved with His work and His cause.**

Passion is defined by Webster's as "a strong emotion that has an overpowering or compelling effect." The Lord God is not going to be able to fulfill His promise to pour out His Spirit upon all flesh in the last days, unless the passion of Jesus first becomes the chief motivation of our lives. The Lord

of the Spirit had to wait for Peter to get to Cornelius' house and preach before He could pour out the Spirit of the Lord upon him and his household. Likewise, we are the ones upon whom God is now waiting! The Word of God says that our sowing and watering are necessary in order for God to give the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). Therefore, if we do not passionately and persistently do our part by sowing and watering, then God by default cannot do His part in giving the increase.

Webster's also defines *passion* as, "the state of being acted upon or affected by something external, especially something alien to one's nature or one's customary behavior." Why would anyone risk his life and enter a burning house to rescue someone in danger? Whatever it is that motivates a rescuer to override his innate drive for self-preservation and save lives is the single greatest need in the Church today. I believe that this zealous ambition to save a person in danger is called *passion*. Passion is the compelling emotion that causes the rescuer to decide to enter the burning house; but, the selfless act of going into the flames to rescue the one in danger is "COMpassion." Passion is the motivation; compassion is the act of doing something about the motivation. WE MUST ALL ANSWER THIS QUESTION: DOES THE SIGHT OF THE LOST MOVE ME LIKE IT DID JESUS?

GOD HAVE MERCY ON THE WORLD WHEN THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED WITHOUT PASSION.

Oh, Church! Oh, Brethren! It is not enough to preach that this world will be lost if they do not obey the gospel. We need the inspired passion of the Great Commission to go "into all the world" to reach them. Our duty to the lost is not fulfilled and our likeness to Christ is not established by standing in the pulpit of our cloistered spiritual sanctuary and declaring to each other how lost the world is. We are commanded to go to them (to take the gospel to them); they are NOT commanded to come to us! Catholics are not the only ones that believe in being *cloistered*, a condition defined as, "religious seclusion...emphasizing in connotation retirement from the world." We Apostolics have cloisters too; we call them "church buildings"! As I have said before, we justify our passionless passivity by saying, "They don't want what we've got." BUT THE TRUTH IS — THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'VE GOT!

What do we think of doctors who do not treat patients by using all of the means available to cure them; or lawyers who do not defend their clients to the fullest of their ability; or politicians who do not keep their campaign promises once they are in office? Are not preachers and churches who do not do their best to reach the lost just the same as these? Is there any malpractice insurance which gives the lost the chance to sue and be compensated for the damage done to their eternal destinies by passionless preachers?

The lost are not the only ones endangered; the redeemed are in peril as well. The greatest threat to the salvation of many of our saints today is not anything produced by Hollywood! The greatest threat is sitting in passionless churches where saints are preached to by passionless preachers, a paradigm of neglect and indifference that seriously jeopardizes their likelihood of being saved! We cloak our maintenance mentality in a pseudo-noble attitude of "protecting our sheep," when the truth is we are protecting the will of our flesh from having to be crucified! We have an agenda, but it is not God's agenda! We have a cause, but it is not the saving of the lost! We have passions, but they are not birthed of the Holy Ghost!

"We need the inspired passion of the Great Commission to go "into all the world" to reach them."

THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST.

Jesus' earthly life was characterized by a unique and compelling passion. The source of this intense emotional drive was His Father's love for mankind. Because His Father lived in Him, the man Christ Jesus also had this same awareness of humanity's need for salvation. Consequently, He surrendered Himself to the necessity of His personal involvement in providing what was needed to accomplish the saving of lost souls. This was His constant and continual motivation. Even at age twelve

He declared, "I must be about My Father's business" (Luke 2:49). During His earthly ministry it is said of Him, quoting the Old Testament, "The zeal [passion] of thine house has eaten me up [consumed me]" (Psalms 69:9, John 2:17).

Theologians have given Jesus' Death, Burial, and Resurrection the appellation, "the Passion of Jesus Christ." This event and the fervent emotional commitment of Jesus to His mission are so inter-related and mutually dependant that the zeal which motived the act has become the title of the act.

If the Son of God needed such awareness of His mission in order to fulfill His calling, then we, as believers and the Church, must also need this same passion to fulfill our calling. It is imperative that we see and feel the same call and cause as He did; otherwise, we will not be sufficiently committed to our pivotal role in leading the lost to deliverance from the powers of darkness.

THE LORD USES THREE THINGS TO PRODUCE PASSION IN US:

The first factor involved in producing passion is the awareness that someone is in great peril and in desperate need of being saved from a life-threatening situation. In the case of all Christians, people must be rescued from the danger of going to hell for eternity. Paul said, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..." (2 Corinthians 5:11).

"It is imperative that we see and feel the same call and cause as He did;" The second factor is the recognition and the acknowledgment that we, as believers, have the power and the ability (as well as the responsibility) to do something to affect the eternal destiny of those in danger. Correspondingly, we must also accept the fact that by not acting on this God-given responsibility, we have attempted to "delegate" this cause and responsibility to others whom we consider to be more "inclined," and who are "not as busy with life" as we are. This is totally unacceptable to God (2 Corinthians 5:6-10). Can we truly claim to be followers of Christ and give greater priority to anything in our life other than being involved with reaching the lost?

The third factor is the sense of urgency. If we are to be truly focused upon seeing the lost saved, then we must act with the knowledge that time is extremely short. Have we explained away to ourselves and others this need for urgency? The Word of God says that, "Today is the day of salvation, now is the accepted time" (Proverbs 27:1; Luke 19:42-44; 2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:7-15; James 4:13-17). Do we want the lost of our day to someday testify against us that, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved"? (Jeremiah 8:20).

Is it good to witness to the lost? Is it good to see our loved ones saved? Is it good for the Church to be giving its very best effort to reach a lost world? James said, "...to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). **No matter how holy we look or how faithful we are with our tithes and church attendance, if we are not doing the good of reaching the lost, we are in sin!**

No one is born with Christ's passion to reach the lost. His passion is not emotionally generated, intellectually obtained, or psychologically induced. Neither is it the product of horror stories or "tales from beyond the grave." It only comes from having "been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Without a relationship with Jesus, we will never see or allow the three factors listed above to affect us. It is His passion living in us and working through us that moves us to act "with passion" — compassion. Fruit (saved souls) is only the proof that this personal relationship is healthy and thriving (John 15:1-8).

THE "BIRTH" OF PASSION.

All of us were born with exactly the same capacity for desire. Jesus said of true believers that out of their "belly" would "flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). What "belly" is the Lord referring to? The Greek word for *belly* means literally "cavity" and figuratively "innermost being" (Strong's). This cavity is a God-designed "emptiness." All of us were born with this emptiness. This emptiness in our souls cries out to be filled. Each of us must make a choice in life as to how we will seek to satisfy this emptiness. The difference between the habitually addicted and the fervent Christian is the simple

matter of choice. One chooses the world and the other chooses God as their source for the satisfaction of their emptiness. The need to fill this emptiness is called *desire*.

This emptiness is coupled with the God-given psychological need for self-preservation. If we did not feel this strong and compelling need to take appropriate actions to preserve ourselves, we would take risks that would recklessly endanger our lives and eventually destroy us. By the Creator's own design, no one in his right mind truly wants to die. **Likewise, no one in his right mind wants to go to hell. NO ONE!**

The God-ordained emptiness in our lives demands some kind of fulfillment. This inner-cry is magnified by the insistent commands of our sense of the need to preserve ourselves. We first come to God seeking a sanctuary which provides for self-preservation and a solution for our unfulfilled emptiness. However, we soon realize that the Lord has another purpose in our salvation and a greater blessing than just saving us from hell. He wants us to develop an intimate personal relationship with Him. He wants to know us; He wants us to know Him.

Somewhere in the growth of our relationship with Jesus, HIS MISSION "to seek and to save that which was lost" begins to gnaw away at our insides. We start to experience an inner conflict that our initial experience with God did not prepare us to face. Because of the great joy, relief from guilt, and deep inner cleansing we experienced when we were saved, we never expected to have to confront such turmoil in our lives ever again. Yet, here it is, and it is very confusing at first.

The message of our responsibility to "rescue the perishing" is disturbing and usually repulsive to most of us as we first consider the Lord's cause and its ramifications in our lives. We came to Jesus to save our lives; now the Spirit and the Word are telling us that we must lose our lives so that others may be saved. The flesh in SELF-preservation recoils at this just as surely as the man standing outside of the burning house considers running from the flames.

We struggle and wrestle with ourselves and with God. We argue, justify, and excuse ourselves; but, we can find no relief. We are haunted by a mental image of Christ on a cross and by the vision of loved ones burning in a literal hell. His words, "for this cause was I born..." echo in the growing emptiness of our being. We deny, we run, and we avoid; but, we cannot escape. Something or someone is gently but firmly insisting that we confront the question: if we refuse to "re-enter the fire" from which we have already been saved, what will become of the lost that are left in "the burning house"?

At this point, every Christian will be faced with an unavoidable decision. We are now at the most crucial crossroad that we will ever encounter in our walk with God. Continuing to grow in our love for God and our relationship with Him only intensifies our exposure to His passion. It is inescapable. It goes with the territory. I cannot have Him without accepting His burden, His goal, and His mission — saving the lost. If I reject His passion, then I am rejecting Him.

The only way for me to escape the convicting passion and compelling love of Jesus Christ for the lost is to begin to withdraw from Him. I must distance myself from His presence because that is the only way out. But, the same inner desire and need for self-preservation that brought me to God in the first place now gnaws on me to stay with God. If I move away from Him, I will find the same misery and empty purposelessness of my past compounded now by the fear of once again being lost. I am trapped. Going backwards is not an option; yet, I refuse to go forward.

At some point in this circular dilemma, a major confrontation with God must happen. He persistently reminds me that I cannot continue in this middle ground of "lukewarmness." I must decide: either I will or I will not obey God. Either I will or I will not participate with Him in His cause. As His seed intended to produce a harvest for Him, either I will or I will not "fall into the ground and die" (John 12:24).

Only those who dare to become that "grain of wheat" which willingly falls into the ground and dies ever really discover a most wonderful secret. It is a secret revealed only after one has entered the house, rescued his loved ones, and is now standing in safety embracing them with thanksgiving and rejoicing. The secret — Joy makes it ALL worthwhile. Experiencing the joy makes risking your life to rescue someone in peril seem almost inconsequential. Similarly, experiencing joy with a soul

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newly saved makes the price we paid to be involved with the lost seem truly insignificant. This joy, for the one who is willing to be crucified with Christ, makes the cross more than bearable. Jesus said that the mother who is in labor "forgets" her pain and travail through the joy of seeing her newborn child. Until we believe in and understand the joy that awaits us on the other side of the cross, we will cheat ourselves out of experiencing the sweetest of all joys — the joy of the soul-winner — and we will rob the lost of their opportunity to know Jesus.

NOT OUR PASSION, BUT HIS PASSION.

The moment we face the cross and accept its role in our lives, we discover that God does not ask us to create our own passion. It is not me that lives after I am crucified with Christ, but Christ who lives in and through me (Galatians 2:20). It is not my passion, but His that motivates me as a crucified disciple to give myself fully to the Lord's cause. **Again, the Lord does not ask me to produce my own passion; He only asks that I allow His passion to flow through me. It is His passion that saves souls, not mine!**

It is not the guilt trip or the threat of hell fire that motivates this soul-saving passion. It is not even the feeling of satisfaction that comes from the "success" of seeing our church grow. True passion comes only from a pure motive. It is imparted by the Savior to His most intimate friends who

have proven their faithfulness, trustworthiness, desire to know Him, and most importantly, their genuine love for His person. Oh, the intimacy of fellowship that is available to those who share His "yoke" with Him.

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It is not sin that makes us feel heavy laden and weary. Notice in Matthew 11:28-30 that the Lord is not calling to those who do not know Him. He is appealing to those who claim to have faith in Him, but are carrying the burdens of their own lives themselves. Why are we weary? Because we are carrying our cares ourselves and not casting our cares upon Him. Why are we carrying our own cares? Because we have pulled back from Him so that we can do our own will rather than be crucified and do His. The Lord will never place the burden of His passion upon those who are exhausted from carrying their own burdens. In order to allow Him to place His burden upon me, I must first cast my burdens upon Him.

His answer to weariness — come to Him, join with Him, know Him, trust Him, and be strengthened by Him. When we come to Him, He offers us intimacy. We are invited to submit to His yoke. The use of the word "yoke" does not imply rest as in vacation; instead, it implies labor or work. But, whose labor or work? His! We pull His burdens with Him as we are yoked together in His yoke. What is His burden? The lost! How will we reach the lost? Through His empowerment of us with His passion. His passion is His love at work in us enabling Him to do His work through us.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST "CAPTURES" US TO PARTICIPATE IN HIS PURPOSE.

"...The love of Christ constraineth us," Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:14. Vine's defines the Greek word translated *constrain* as, "to hold together, confine, secure, to hold fast; to constrain." Jesus' passion to save the lost is the product of His Father's love. This love is like a mighty torrent of water seeking for an outlet. The Lord's love must have a channel or conduit through which to flow before He is enabled to reach the lost. The longer we delay in allowing His love to flow through us to the lost, the greater the pressure builds within us. His love demands an opening, an outlet. Let us provide Him with a conduit, beginning now.

The Greek word for *constraineth* also means to "compel." *Constrain* is defined by Webster's as "to force; compel; oblige." *Compel* means "a driving irresistibly to some action, condition, etc." *Constrain* also implies "the operation of a restricting force and therefore suggests a strained, repressed, or unnatural quality in that which results." Passion (the Lord's love for the lost) is a powerful force that works in our lives to produce decisions and actions that are contrary to normal human

emotions and the preferences of a particular personality. We are "constrained" by His passion; it "compels" us to act. His love compels us to give up living our lives our way, so that we "should not henceforth live unto [ourselves] but unto Him that died for [us] and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Passion does not look for self-justifications for being uninvolved; rather, it refuses to give up without finding a way where there seems to be no way. It does not let us use past failures or present obstacles as excuses for not taking action. Passion is too focused for such distractions. The urgency that produces passion demands that we act in spite of our past weaknesses and inconsistencies, and regardless of how we feel about ourselves.

Likewise, passion will not let us consider human limitations. We have all read stories of people who have hastened to the screams of a loved one trapped underneath an automobile that has fallen off of the carjack. Without hesitating or considering the limits of human ability, they grabbed the bumper and lifted; thereby freeing their loved one and saving their life. Impossible? Passion did not think so!

In this same manner, the passion of Jesus Christ works in us. But, we will never act if we dwell upon the immensity of the task, the lack of adequate resources, or the limited number of laborers. Passion demands action; it does not take no for an answer; it does not accept excuses. It just says, "There is a need; it is a desperate situation and the time is short — MOVE! Do not just stand there talking about it; do something — NOW"!

"I DON'T FEEL THE LOVE OF GOD ANYMORE."

Passion is love demanding to be expressed. We are all looking for the feeling and bond that love gives. But, we are afraid to express it and let it flow. So, we become frustrated and feel unloved. Let me say it again: all of us want to love and be loved, but that is not possible unless we first release the Lord's passion in us from the bonds of self-will.

When we initially come to God, His love flowing into us is beyond our comprehension. It is so awesome and overwhelming that it is difficult to express or describe. But, as time goes on, the intensity of the feeling of His love begins to wane. We become perplexed: we cannot figure out what has "gone wrong." We desperately try many things in attempting to reproduce the original feeling of our first experience with God. But, nothing works!

Meanwhile, God is persistently calling us to allow Him to work through our lives to save others. But, we cannot concern ourselves with others while we are so preoccupied with trying to "find our way back to God." We earnestly search for the answer as we persist in ignoring His urgings. The longer this situation exists, the less qualified we feel to tell anybody that "God loves them." Consequently, we resist God's dealings with us even more. Our relationship with Jesus gradually diminishes to the point that we are barely on speaking terms with Him. We feel that the Lord has rejected us and we do not know why. We are confused and maybe even angry with God. We have repented for every sin we can think of many times over and nothing seems to produce renewal within us. It is at this point that many people give up!

The revelation that we have refused to accept is: love can only be felt when it is flowing. We felt it so overwhelmingly in the beginning because it "flowed" INTO us. Therefore, we decided (and the pulpit confirmed) that we needed to get full and stay full of the Holy Ghost. So, our focus became centered upon ourselves by narrowing to just us being blessed with a renewing, a refilling, a "praying through" again — continuously. However, as we held all of this blessing and power within and kept it there for our pleasure and benefit, the pool of love in us began to stagnate. As it stagnated, we began to lose the feeling of either God or His love being within us, no matter how many times we were "blessed" in church. Why? **Again, love can only be felt when it is flowing!**

Paul told us that "...the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost..." (Romans 5:5). In John 7:38, Jesus said that the Spirit of God, Living Water, would flow "**OUT OF**" our belly (our innermost being: the empty cavity that God has filled). God's love can neither be contained

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nor constrained. It demands expression. Initially, God is satisfied with our expressing love to Him in prayer and praise. Yet now, the Lord's passion presses us to allow it to flow through us to reach the lost. He declared His focus when He said, "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, AND ye shall be witnesses unto me..." (Acts 1:8). Consequently, with our continued refusal to allow Him to pour through us, even our prayer and praise become empty and unfulfilling.

If we want to have abundant life, we must remove the restrictions and blockages in our lives. We must permit His love to gush forth as life-giving rivers to those in need of a Savior. If we are to experience an ever increasing intensity of the love of God in our lives personally, then His love must be permitted to flow through our lives to others. We are His conduits for life-giving spiritual water to flow to a lost and thirsty world. **Ultimately, we all must choose what our lives will become: A DAM OR A RIVER BED.**

PASSIONLESS LIVING IS NOT LIVING AT ALL.

According to Webster's, the word *apathy* comes from two Greek words. The first is the prefix *a-* which means "no, without." The other is the word *pathos* which means "passion, emotion, love." Apathy is having "NO LOVE"! *Apathy* is the condition of the unconcerned, the indifferent. *Apathy* and *compassion* are antonyms; they are mutually exclusive terms and conditions. Again, *compassion* means "with passion," while *apathy* means "without passion." Which one of these two words best describes Jesus and His true followers? Which one most accurately describes us?

"If we want to have abundant life, we must remove the restrictions and blockages in our lives."

If we continue to be uninvolved with the lost, this same apathy will eventually supersede our devotion to God and the things of God. Beware! The Lord has strong feelings about the apathetic. Those whose spiritual lives degenerate to the point of complacency are repugnant and abhorrent to God.

The Lord said of Isaac's sons in Malachi 1:2-3, "...I loved Jacob. And I hated Esau...." It seems inconceivable that any human being could so provoke our kind, merciful, and loving God to the point where He would actually say of that man, "I hate him." But, Esau so provoked the Lord. How? He showed a total lack of interest in God and the things of God, even though he had ready access to the best that God could offer a man at that time.

Esau sought repentance only after discovering the benefits he had lost by passing up the blessings he was heir to by birth. He did not grieve over what his sin had cost God and His plan; instead, he only grieved over how his sin had impacted him personally. Therefore, God refused to grant repentance to a man who only selfishly sorrowed over the painful consequences of his own apathy. God HATED this man! We have so much more available to us today. Yet, how

passionate are we for God and the things of God? Are we using God to get His benefits for ourselves instead of allowing God to use us for the benefit of His cause and His Kingdom?

Jesus told the indifferent Laodiceans that their spiritual temperature made Him so sick to His stomach that, if they did not change, He would be forced to throw up, thereby ejecting them out of His presence. What was the root of their condition? They had already excluded Him from their presence. They "supped" (had church) without Him being with them. Jesus was consigned to having to knock on the door to attempt to gain access to His own house. It seems incomprehensible that the "Apostolics" of Laodicea could be so deceived about themselves as to continue in the trappings of "Churchianity" without even realizing that God was missing. Such is the result of the decision to refuse to participate with God in His Mission. He will not forever continue to fellowship with those who show absolutely no concern whatsoever over the things for which He gave His life.

Some seek to satisfy the conviction of the Holy Ghost to be involved with the lost by giving to missions, while still retaining their control over their time and their lives. However, giving alone does not meet His expectation for our involvement; it only exhibits that there is a flicker of hope that we recognize the need to be involved. **GIVING MONEY IS THE LEAST THAT WE CAN DO! JESUS WANTS US TO GIVE OURSELVES!**

To even the "perfect church" at Ephesus, which seemingly did everything right, the Lord said, "...I have somewhat against you because you have left your first love" (Revelation 2:4). He called them to repent or be removed from their place in Him. The salvation of the lost was never an option with Christ. Neither can we opt to neglect it without incurring a severe penalty to our souls. Can I truly say that I love Jesus and yet not love what He loves? What does Jesus love? The lost! Do I?

ARE WE A PASSIONLESS CHURCH?

We need to honestly and objectively look at ourselves. We need to ask ourselves some very difficult questions. Does Jesus see us like we think He does? Or, does He see us in a completely different light than we have convinced ourselves that He does?

Is not the Church today more interested in putting on a good front to the community than being the voice of God to this world? Does it not seem that we are reducing the number of services we have each week ("as we see the day approaching" — Hebrews 10:25) in order to make "church involvement" more convenient for the un-committed lukewarm, rather than challenging the faithful to a greater commitment to the reaching of the lost? Have not our services become predictable Pentecostal programs, rather than moves of God with demonstrations of the Spirit and power of God (1 Corinthians 2:1-5) so that sinners will be convicted and repent (1 Corinthians 14:24-25)?

Have not we become more enamored with oratory than anointing in our pulpits and with cultural mannerisms of delivery style rather than substance and conviction? Do we not seem to spend more time "writing" our sermons than we do on our knees seeking for a "word from God" (Jeremiah 23:18-22)? Are we not more prone to use psychology to influence people rather than to rely on spirituality? Are we not more interested in convenience than crucifixion?

Are not our "evangelism" methods more geared to inviting people to see our nice facility, to meet our nice people, to hear our good preacher, and to listen to our talented music and choir, than for them to come see the resurrected Christ manifested in our midst? Are we not more focused on building a crowd than reaping a harvest? Are we not more concerned about our acceptance by the world than by Jesus receiving glory; more desirous of pleasing man than pleasing God? Is not the Church today more involved with promoting our issues rather than reaching a lost world? Is there any real resemblance between the first century church and the Apostolic Church today? With a few exceptions, has not today's Church lost its passion — its fire — its zeal?

Does a hospital have a right to call itself a hospital if no one is getting well? Does a fire department have a right to call itself one if it is not involved in putting out fires? Is a grocery store a grocery store if there is no food in it to buy? If we do not strive to reach the lost with everything in us, do we have a right to call ourselves "the Church"? To consider this even further, without fulfilling our calling and our purpose for being here, do we even have a right to exist? Are we a passionless church in the eyes of our Lord?

"Is not the Church today more interested in putting on a good front to the community than being the voice of God to this world?"

IS THE BODY OF CHRIST STILL DOING WHAT IT CAME TO DO?

The Apostle Paul said that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..." (1 Timothy 1:15). Every other reason for His coming is secondary in importance to this emphatically stated purpose. Notice that Paul used the appellation *Christ* before the Lord's name instead of after it. The order of the titles *Lord* and *Christ* when used with the name *Jesus* is always significant to the points that Paul made in his writings. In this context, the title *Christ* being used before the name *Jesus* is a direct reference to the humanity of Jesus and places special emphasis upon it.

The original Greek in 1 Timothy 1:15 is very clear. Christ "came" into the world for the purpose of saving the lost. The Greek word for *come* means "to come from one place to another" (Thayer's). What or who came into the world? The *logos*, the Word! And, the *logos* was made flesh for the purpose of providing salvation (John 1:1,14). What did the Word (*logos*) made flesh become?

The "Christ"! What does the word *Christ* mean? The "Anointed One"! The deity in Him (the Father) was doing the anointing, but the one who was being anointed was the humanity (the Son of God) — the Christ, the Anointed One.

One problem; Christ is not here any more is He? Is not the man Christ Jesus gone? Did He not leave for Heaven two thousand years ago? **NO!** The only part of Christ that went to heaven was the head of the body (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18). The body of Christ (the "Anointed One") is still here! Who is the body of Christ? The Church! Whatever Christ did while He was on earth, the body of Christ is still able to do on earth today (John 14:12). **BUT THE QUESTION IS — IS HIS BODY DOING NOW WHAT CHRIST JESUS DID THEN?**

No one else is here to do God's will but us — the Church. God has no other plan than us — the Church. We, the Church, are it!

II Corinthians 5:18-20 makes it very clear that the ministry of reconciliation Jesus exercised while here on earth has been committed to us — the Church. The Greek word for *commit* means "to put for oneself; to assign, place in, or appoint." We, the Church, are His Ambassadors and His only "representatives" on earth. We have been called to perform the ministry of reconciling the lost unto God — "**in His stead**" (literally, "**in His place**") (2 CORINTHIANS 5:20).

We, the Church, are called to accept the responsibility of the ministry of reconciliation. Yet, is the body of Christ, the Church, truly conducting itself as if it both believed and accepted such a responsibility? The man Christ Jesus is no longer the world's only hope! The Church is! The world will only see and know God to the degree that the Church demonstrates Him to them!

**"The Lord
will not and
CANNOT
reach the
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Himself. He
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Church."**

Some will say "God is sovereign and does not need man to do anything." This is only partially true. God is sovereign. He can and will do as He pleases, including exercising His power and authority to limit Himself. By God's own plan and purpose (*logos*), He has limited Himself to work only through mankind in the present temporal dimension. He has the right to do this. If we limit God, it is sin (Psalms 78:41). If He limits Himself, it becomes His plan of salvation. Once the Lord has made the decision to limit Himself to reach the lost of the world only through man (and He has), **He will not violate it himself even if it means that all of mankind ends up lost.**

God sought for a man among His people to stand in the gap and make up the hedge (Ezekiel 22:30), yet He could not find even one. Because of the limitations He had placed upon His sovereignty, He had to become a man in order to be able to provide for man's salvation Himself (Isaiah 59:16; 63:5).

The man Christ Jesus that the Word (*logos*) became is no longer with us. The Church is NOW that "man." The Lord will not and CANNOT reach the lost by Himself. He will work ONLY through His Church.

The Lord has given the authority over the "gates of hell" only to His Church, and such authority is essential to setting sinners free from their sins (Matthew 16:18-19). God is bound by His own Word and plan! He has no other way but the Church. The Lord has no other plan but the Church. The lost have no other hope but the Church. God cannot and will not save the lost by Himself. He has already done all that He can do alone. Again, the Church is His plan; He has no back-up or contingency plan to compensate for a passionless church! I repeat the question, **IS THE CHURCH FULFILLING ITS CALLING? IS THE BODY OF CHRIST DOING WHAT IT FIRST CAME TO BETHLEHEM TO DO? IS THE BODY OF CHRIST STILL ANSWERING THE CALL AND CAUSE FOR WHICH IT WAS BORN?**

FOR THIS CAUSE WERE WE SAVED!

John 12:23-28

And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.

Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.

The essence of Christ's passion can be clearly seen in John 12:23-28. He understood the purpose and the price of what He was here to do. He could not save others' lives and yet preserve His own. We likewise do not have the option of saving our lives to live as we please, still expecting to be saved by God. "For this cause came I into the world...", Jesus declared. God expects those of us whom He has saved to give ourselves to this same cause. Along with Esther, we must come to the revelation that we have "come to the kingdom for such a time as this." Will we respond to His call? The lost await our answer! **FOR US AS THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE HOUR IS COME!**

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