

Why Are Young People Leaving Church in America?

Dr. Brown discusses the increasing exodus of American young people from church with Melanie Tomczak.

Unconditional Trust in God Is Easy

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17)

I often hear people say that it is difficult to unconditionally trust in God. I believe that this is due to a misunderstanding of how God works. God wants to give us the peace that passes all understanding (see Phil. 4:6-7). The first step in the process is to be anxious for nothing. Don't we all wish for that? In Christianity, we cast all of our care on the Lord in order to be able to do this (see 1 Pet. 5:5-7). We don't hold back anything. This does not reduce us to inaction. It merely takes the stress out of our daily activities. This concept is foreign to most of us who grew up with the idea that we worry about the things we can control and not worry about the things that we can't. This is not in the Bible.

God is an integral part of the process. We cannot have perfect peace without God. The world also seeks inner peace, but it does not make use of God in order to arrive at this.

Meditation practices in other religions and philosophies can only provide an unsustained, temporary peace. The biblical God is not in them; therefore, they do not bring you to a sustained inner peace. *"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever, for in God the Lord we have an everlasting rock"* (Is. 26:3-4). In God there are both peace and strength.

Many people don't realize that this type of thing is even spoken of in the Bible, so they seek it in other religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. The general theme of non-biblical spiritualities is to go inward to find their god. In the Bible, the thrust of the mind is outward in order to bring God inward. We don't strive for peace, because this would be a contradiction. Striving, of itself, is non-peace; so how can striving bring you to its opposite. We rest our minds on God in order to have His peace. We surrender our striving. This is a very passive/receptive stance towards God. It is called humility.

Christ is the one who brings us to this place of peace when we trust in Him unconditionally. He says in Matthew 11:28-30: *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me. For I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."* Christ is saying that He has inner peace from His humility and trust in the Father and that He can share it with us. This is the peace that passes all understanding. It doesn't come from ourselves and what we can do with our own strength. The presence of Christ's Spirit within us carries this rest for our souls. It is a fruit of the Spirit. This is how it gets transferred to us; then, all we have to do is to yield to it. The same is true of strength or temperance, which is also a fruit of the Spirit.

Peace and strength are available to anyone who wants to have

them for themselves, but God resists the proud. Pride will prevent most humans from going to God. The effects of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil are present in all of us. The thought of needing God is a stumbling block for many. We are more comfortable with relying on our own failed methods. We believe that our own knowledge of good and evil is enough for us to do the right thing, but we are wrong. We all have a built-in human weakness that makes us do the things that we don't want to do, and not do the things that we should. Paul describes it in Romans 7:14-8:2.

Peace and strength can only come from Christ's Spirit, who was poured out at Pentecost. Christ had to go through the redemption process of death and resurrection in order for these to be made available for us. If He was just a dead prophet or teacher, His Spirit would not be available. He needs to be alive so that we can live.

You can download Peter Aiello's book, Hidden Treasure by visiting his web site: .

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Joyce Meyer Reveals the Key to Genuine Soul Healing

Jesus came to earth to show us the love of God, and to give His life so we could have eternal life. He was perfect—sinless—and He willingly took our sin upon Himself on the cross to pay the price for our salvation. God's love for us is so amazing!

Isaiah 61:1-3 (NIV) says Jesus came "to proclaim good news to

the poor ... to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners ... to comfort all who mourn ... to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”

And Psalm 147:3 says, “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” Jesus wants to heal our wounded souls, give us His joy, and work through our lives to help others discover same restoration and hope that we have!

My Story

I’ve had a lot of experience in this area. I used to be such a mess on the inside—in my soul. The pain of years of abuse caused me to become a miserable, bitter, angry, emotionally unstable woman. I didn’t trust anyone and I believed I had to take care of myself because nobody else would. I was afraid if anyone really knew me—the real me—they wouldn’t like me or accept me.

For years I lived this way, and I didn’t understand why. But when I got serious about my relationship with God and started really studying His Word, I discovered His amazing love and how I needed Him to heal my wounded soul.

Once I had this revelation, I made a decision that I was going to go all the way through the healing process with God, and I refused to live with the pain, secrets and regrets from my past. By God’s grace, I have experienced healing and wholeness in my soul in many ways. And now I am passionate about sharing my story and helping others find the love, healing and hope they need so they don’t live trapped in pain from their past.

Everyone Has a Story

We all go through hard things in this life, and we all experience wounds in our soul. Those wounds cause pain that can then cause us to hurt others. I like to say it like this:

Hurting people hurt people.

Your soul is the inner part of you—your mind, will and emotions. And the condition of your soul is felt by those who are in relationship with you.

Maybe you struggle to have healthy relationships because of fear of rejection and insecurity based on past disappointments or betrayals of your trust. Or you may be angry and have bitterness and unforgiveness in your heart because of what someone has done to you. There are many reasons people have wounds in their soul.

Living with this kind of pain makes a person unstable emotionally and hard to get along with. I remember when Dave and I were first married and I was like this. I'm speaking from experience when I say there is nothing worse than being controlled by your feelings, angry and unhappy when things don't go your way.

But there is hope because Jesus can heal us everywhere we hurt! And God's Word contains the power to save our souls.

The Key to Genuine Soul-Healing

James 1:21 (AMP) says, "So get rid of all uncleanness and all that remains of wickedness, and with a humble spirit receive the word [of God] which is implanted [actually rooted in your heart], which is able to save your souls."

Through a serious commitment to study God's Word and spend time with Him every day in prayer, God has radically changed my life. My mind has been renewed by God's truth (Rom. 12:2), and I don't live by my feelings anymore. My will has also been transformed; I can actually want what *God wants* now more than what *I want*.

It took time for me to get a major breakthrough in this area, and it wasn't easy. But being healed and having real peace,

joy and love in my heart are so much better than living with pain of a wounded soul.

One of the best things you can do for yourself is let God heal you on the inside and restore the brokenness in your life. Then you can be example of God's amazing love and grace, helping them see that if He can do it for you, He can do it for them, too.

The truth is you don't have to stay broken, living in self-pity, hating yourself, burdened by regret, shame or fear every day of your life. I promise that if you will make a determined decision to trust God and believe His Word more than anything else—more than your thoughts, past experience, feelings or what others say—then you will experience healing in your soul.

Franklin Graham: Only God Can Fix America

On the last night of his Decision Texas Tour in Longview, Texas, Franklin Graham handed down a powerful warning about the state of America.

“Our country is in trouble,” he said, adding that hatred and division is running rampant.

“The Republicans cannot fix our country. I don't care how much the president tries to drain the swamp. I think that swamp is just too big and too deep,” he said. “The Republicans aren't going to be able to fix it. The Democrats aren't going to be able to fix it. The only person who can fix the problems of this nation is God.”

Graham urged believers everywhere to pray that God would heal the hearts of the nation's leaders so they will "work together for the good of all Americans."

"We are told in the Scriptures that we are to pray for those that are in authority. I've had some people tell me 'I'm not going to pray for somebody I didn't vote for.' Well, that's not what the Bible says," he said as the crowd rose to its feet to stand in prayer.

"If our politicians can solve our border issue, we'll all be better. If they can solve our taxes, we'll all be better. If they can solve the problems as it relates to our health care, we'll all be better," Graham urged.

"I'm not asking that we pray one time ... I want this to be a pattern in your life," Graham said.

He said if the nation humbles itself, God can and will change the heart of its leaders.

"We've got to work together and God has got to bring the hearts of our politicians together," he said.

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Jentezen Franklin: Why You Need to Break Out into 'Leper Worship'

Jentezen Franklin says God will never reject "leper worship." That's good to know—but what is "leper worship"? He explains

in this short video and says why he believes today's church strongly needs an outpouring of that worship.

What Happened When Chonda Pierce Got to Interview an Australian Worship Leader

Nathan Tasker had no idea what he was in for. The Australian singer-songwriter and worship leader shared the stage with Chonda Pierce for 11 minutes, and she had plenty of bizarre questions for him. Their hilarious conversation covers everything from politics to kangaroo hunting.

An Appeal to Tyler Perry to Return to Pleasing God

A number of years ago, entrepreneur and movie mogul Tyler Perry was interviewed on CBN. He concluded by saying his phenomenal success would continue as long as he did the following: "If I keep sowing good things, keep doing my best and keep trying to please God, that's the only harvest that can come to me."

Because of my respect and love for our multi-gifted brother in Christ, I write this commentary in hopes it will bring about a course correction to his current trajectory. Although

imperceptible to some, his career has recently drifted off course. My sincere prayer is that he will read this and make the necessary adjustments.

Tyler Perry's new film, out just in time for October 31, is *Boo 2! A Madea Halloween*. This comedy sequel features our Christian brother garbed as a burly grandma in his infamous Madea role. Made for \$25 million, the film is bringing in big bucks, like most of his past films.

Tyler knows the formula to draw an audience, yet something continues off track in both the filmmaker's personal life and in the contents of this latest offering. While Medea is yukking it up in character on screen, Tyler's character off screen is slipping in ways that concern multitudes who love and admire him.

Back to the Beginning

Tyler Perry grew up in Louisiana, strongly influenced by his God-fearing mother, who took him to church regularly. He said in his 2010 biography that it was his "refuge which brought him contentment." This was critical, because the man that he thought was his father was an abusive man with whom he struggled terribly, eventually bringing him to a place of attempted suicide.

Young Tyler left home, changed his name, didn't complete high school and explored a career in writing. Eventually he authored a play, *I Know I've Been Changed*, performed at a community theater in Atlanta, Georgia.

The musical was a financial failure. At 22, Perry spent his \$12,000 life savings in the endeavor but it left him depressed and destitute. He found himself homeless for six years and literally slept in a small Geo Metro car (as a six-foot-five man) or at pay-by-the-week motels full of crackheads.

During these years of adversity, he prayed, persevered and

continued to perfect the play with the biblical themes of forgiveness and dignity. God eventually opened a door to re-stage it and take the production on the road, where his touring enabled him to gain a devoted following among African-American audiences.

In time, Tyler Perry launched into film, and by 2011, his work had grossed over \$500 million worldwide. TV shows developed, and Oprah Winfrey had him on her show multiple times. He signed an exclusive multi-year partnership with her and OWN (Oprah Winfrey Network) as his empire grew.

Forbes named Tyler Perry the second highest-earning man in Hollywood by 2010. In 2017, his net worth was over \$600 million. He sold his Atlanta house for \$17.5 million, purchased 1100 acres for his company, plus a 58-acre estate for his mansion.

In 2019, he begins his long-term deal with Viacom for an original drama and comedy series. Truly life has been extremely good to this hard-working, “rags to riches” man who promised, “If I keep sowing good things, keep doing my best and keep trying to please God that’s the only harvest that can come to me.”

Disturbing Developments

In the CBN interview, Tyler spoke of being “saved” and how he had to “forgive on his way to success.” He shared how struggles “kept me humble” and how “God reminds me of this.” He also mentioned that “prayer warriors hold him accountable,” and though he was not married at the time, “I’m so very careful with what I say because of children.”

All of the above is commendable but some recent developments are a cause for concern on two fronts.

1. Films going from obnoxious to offensive.

Early on, I like millions enjoyed Tyler's comedic films featuring the Madea character. Sure, she was a bit over the top and annoying, but almost all of it was in good-natured fun.

Not anymore!

We stopped patronizing the previously, family-friendly franchise awhile back. Now it's been brought to my attention that allegedly his latest offering, *Boo2!* had an R rating from the Motion Picture Association of America until Perry made changes to raise the bar.

Do we really need more celluloid products that further coarsen our culture, embarrass parents and portray characters in a foul, immoral manner? One person who saw this current flick said the family in front of him walked out.

This movie features teenage girls' escapades at an all-night Halloween party with frat guys in a house where 14 youth were murdered. The storyline serves up "wholesome" family fun including: getting drunk, smoking dope, "hooking up," crude double entendres, profane language and repeated misuse of God's name.

In this day and age of raising awareness on "Weinsteinish" exploitation of vulnerable females, do we really need more in-your-face portrayals of men's lust-driven sexual advances while rattling off references to [prostitutes] and "days as a pimp"?

Sure, Madea and her comrades will try to fetch them, but honestly, do we have to sink so low for entertainment? Slapstick and silliness are one thing, but seduction, sensuality and sin are still another.

Producers don't have to resort to cheesy, unrealistic productions to communicate authentic stories and life lessons. Anyone remember the fantastic film, *Blindside* that was

nominated for an Academy Award Best Film?

C'mon Tyler, don't let Hollywood lure you away from your roots and religious foundations. And while we're serving you with some constructive criticism because we honestly love and deeply care about you, there's a second concern.

2. Departing from pleasing God to promiscuity with your lady friend.

Almost everyone knows that the best indicator of success for children is an intact nuclear family with a married father and mother. With the state of the black family in serious decline and the number of African-American children born out of wedlock now at a shocking 72 percent, there is a critical need for visible black leaders to regain the moral high ground and be godly examples.

Mr. Perry often refers to the trauma of his dysfunctional childhood experience with the man who was not really his father and who mistreated him. How might his life have been different if he was reared in a home with a godly father and mother married to each other, obeying biblical standards, committed to doing the will of God?

Not long ago, unfortunately, Tyler began veering off God's clear path for men and women regarding marriage and family. Millions who look to him as a role model for their lives and their children were shocked. He and his girlfriend, model Gelila, are reported not to be married but rather living together ("lifestyle fornication"). In 2014, they had an out-of-wedlock baby boy, Aman.

The same article says Oprah Winfrey is one of their son's godmothers. Tyler says that the best advice Oprah's given him is this: "Just live in the moment. Just be present in what is going on in your life." He says, "For me, I just want to make sure that I'm enjoying it as much as I can."

Here's the deal: Material success and New Age advice from people like Oprah Winfrey have influenced Tyler Perry on a dangerous and deceptive path. For millions of us who have followed his career and pointed scores of our youth in his direction, now is the time to pray for his turnaround to once again please the God who has so richly blessed him.

New Texas Law Seen as Huge Victory for Religious Freedom

When it comes to adoption, putting children with same-sex couples often leads to a fierce debate.

A lesbian couple in Michigan is suing the state after two Christian adoption agencies turned them away because they are gay.

"I'm very lucky to have very supportive friends and family, and I work in a very supportive environment," said Kristy Dumont.

"I really have not faced any discrimination over being gay, so calling the agencies and being told that it's our policy not to place kids with same-sex families was pretty hard to hear," she said in a video produced by the ACLU of Michigan.

Texas Law Protects Faith-Based Adoption Agencies

In order to prevent such lawsuits in Texas, lawmakers passed a bill that would protect Christian adoption agencies for refusing gay couples.

Faith-based operations make up 25 percent of the child-placing agencies in Texas.

Over the past few years, many faith-based groups stopped taking cases from the state's foster care system, fearing their biblical view of marriage would clash with the LGBT community.

In an interview with CBN News, Scott Collins, senior vice president of Buckner International said, "Your religious convictions should not deny you the opportunity to care for children."

Buckner, an evangelical charity in Dallas, serves more than 1,000 Texas children each year.

"There's just not enough places for them," explained Collins.

"We've had children who've had to sleep on the floor of offices because there was nowhere to take 'em that night or the next night."

The recently passed Freedom to Serve Children Act protects groups like Buckner if they refuse to place children with gay couples.

Collins said, "We believe that God's design for a family is a man and a woman. That's our biblically held belief and so, based on that, and with a number of other faith-based providers here in Texas, and obviously with the support of legislature and the governor of Texas, we have been able to secure this extra layer of protection for us to be able to really live out our biblical convictions."

Texas Law Under Fire from LGBT Community

But the law has drawn fierce backlash from the LGBT community.

The state of California added Texas to its list of states banned from travel to conduct state business, claiming those states have laws that promote sexual discrimination.

The discrimination claim includes Alabama, Kansas, Kentucky,

Mississippi, North Carolina, South Dakota and Tennessee.

“To travel to these states at state expense would mean that we would be using taxpayer dollars to support these states and we think it would be an offense to all those individuals in America who feel this scourge of discrimination,” said Xavier Becerra, California’s attorney general.

Dumont argues that refusing gay couples makes it difficult for children to be placed in loving homes.

“It affects the children because there are so many other couples like us out there who want to provide a home for these kids and are being told no because of this,” she said.

Law Seen as Major Victory for Religious Freedom

Supporters of the Texas law disagree.

“At the end of the day what we’re trying to get is more homes and I don’t think this prevents more homes from coming from any sector of society from coming to the table,” said Texas Rep James Frank, the bill’s sponsor.

Meanwhile, Christians who feel their beliefs on marriage and family are increasingly attacked see the law as a major victory for religious freedom.

But Collins maintains it’s also about saving lives

Bottom Line: What’s Best for the Children?

“For us what it comes down to is what about the children?” he said.

“Do they win? Is this a win for the children? Not for any group or organization. It really is about the kids.”

He said he is just thankful the new law allows them to continue helping the state’s most vulnerable.

“We believe this is a very inclusive law,” he said.

“We’re not saying in any way that some people are bad and shouldn’t be parents. We’re just saying this is what we believe. These are sincerely held religious convictions that we have, and we want to continue to do what we’ve done for 138 years now.”

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Since When Did Jesus Get Connected to Guns?

Since when did the gospel become associated with guns? Since when did the Christian faith become linked to the right to bear arms?

Lest I be misunderstood, this article is not about gun control, nor is it about the Second Amendment.

I am not asking whether Christians should serve in the military, and I am not questioning our right to defend ourselves.

I’m simply asking why conservative Christianity—in particular, American evangelical Christianity—is so strongly linked with a passion for guns. There’s certainly no scriptural connection to be made.

Again, I’m not advocating for new gun-control laws, and I’m not saying that we roll over and die when attacked by our enemies. I’m not even questioning to what degree churches should have security in place in their assemblies.

That's not my focus or issue at all, and I understand clearly: 1) the importance of the Second Amendment in American history; 2) the emphasis many American evangelicals put on holding to our Constitutional rights; and 3) common sense issues of self-defense.

Still, I find it odd that many Americans associate evangelical Christians with guns—and I don't just mean that some evangelicals enjoy hunting. I mean that "gospel" and "guns" seem to go hand in hand. If ever there was an example of odd bedfellows, it's here.

It would be one thing if radical Muslims were associated with guns or if white separatists were associated with guns. But conservative followers of Jesus? What's our specific and unique connection to guns? Frankly, I don't see it.

In contrast with Muhammad, who was a warrior as well as a spiritual leader, the founder of our faith was crucified. And in contrast with the early followers of Muhammad, who went to war on his behalf, the early followers of Jesus were put to death as lambs going to the slaughter.

In the words of Paul, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:35-37, quoting from Ps. 44:11).

This remains the pattern around the world today, where followers of Jesus are the persecuted, not the persecutors. How did this switch so dramatically in American culture?

Again, I'm not questioning whether Christians can serve in the military and fight against our enemies, and I'm not raising the issue of self-defense or security.

My point is that the New Testament faith was not a faith of physical violence or swords or martial confrontation, and Jesus himself said to Peter that “all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword.” (See Matt. 26:52; for the record, it is quite specious to build a theology of carrying arms based on Luke 22:35-38, as I demonstrate in *The Real Kosher Jesus*.)

The point of all this is simple: Our debates about gun control and the Second Amendment and the strength of our military should not get in the way of our discussion about Jesus and the gospel. Fundamentally, there is no connection between the two, and there are devoted followers of Jesus who serve in the high echelons of the military and devoted followers of Jesus who are conscientious objectors. (Would anyone question the Christian conviction as well as military valor of the subject of Mel Gibson’s *Hacksaw Ridge*?)

What prompts me to write this article, though, is the increasing connection in our culture between the gospel and guns, and it is as foreign to me as would be a connection between Jesus and roller coasters or Paul and soccer or Peter and airplanes. To repeat: There is no scriptural (or logical) connection between them.

So, while it’s fine to have our uniquely American discussion about these issues, given our roots and the purpose of the Second Amendment, let’s separate the gospel from guns. I can preach the former without carrying the latter.

Did God Divide the Church 500

Years Ago?

As a student of church history (I am not a church historian) and one who has tried to dig deep into my Christian roots so I am best able to position myself and the congregations I influence, I have a strong connection to both the ancient and future church—since the height of the tree is limited by the depth of the roots!

As part of my journey, I have often wondered if the Protestant Reformation was worth it. In other words, did the Reformation do more harm than good regarding the health of the church and the influence of the kingdom of God? I ask myself if the Reformation was something that could have been avoided since it dissolved Christendom into mere Christianity. This is something many on the Anabaptist, pietistic side welcome, while those working for a kingdom witness and reconstruction of the nations are working hard to recapture. Some of us fall between these polar-opposite positions.

One of the unsung heroes of church history was the Catholic theologian Erasmus. He represented a third option besides the positions of the Roman Catholics and Protestant pioneer provocateur Martin Luther. Erasmus wanted to reform the church, return the church to its biblical roots, and rid it of internal abuses; but was not willing to break the ecclesial unity of the church. Often I have wished that Erasmus won the day instead of Luther. But unfortunately, the popes of his day did not heed his warnings, resulting in a third schism.

Besides the first schism of East and West in the 11th century, this was the most devastating schism of the church. It wasn't until Vatican II of the early 1960s, almost 450 years too late, that the Catholic Church finally started coming toward Erasmus! I have also wondered if there was biblical precedent for the Reformation. I have come to the conclusion that the Scriptures are clear: God honors His name above all else and

He does not tolerate abuses in His name by any faith community, whether Israel of the past or the church of the past and present!

Our primary historic case study is the nation of Israel. As much as God values unity among His people (as prayed by Jesus in John 17:20-23), He judged the 12 tribes of Israel by dividing their kingdom because of the apostasy of King Solomon.

First Kings 11:9-11 says: "The Lord was angry with Solomon because he turned his heart away from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had warned him about this, that he should not follow other gods, but he was disobedient to the Lord's command. Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, 'Since you have done this and have not kept My covenant and statutes, which I commanded you, I will surely take the kingdom from you and give it to your servant.'"

Later, the writer of 1 Kings 11:29-34 says: "At that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him along the way, and he had dressed himself in a new garment, and the two *of them* were alone in the field. Ahijah took off the new garment that he wore and tore it into twelve pieces, and he said to Jeroboam: Take ten pieces, for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "See, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you (but he shall have one tribe for My servant David's sake and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel), because they have forsaken Me and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molek the god of the children of Ammon and have not walked in My ways and have not done that which is right in My eyes, to keep My statutes and judgments, as his father David had done. 'However, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David My servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept My commandments and My

statutes.'”

In the very next chapter we see this prophecy fulfilled when the tribes of Israel broke away from Solomon’s son, King Rehoboam, which left him as the ruler of Judah only.

Then, to take it a step further, when both of the kings of Israel and Judah continued to turn away from the law of the Lord, God scattered all of His people among the nations. They didn’t return again as one nation until the post-exilic period during the days of Nehemiah and Ezra. We see this during the days of Jeremiah when God was already planning to divide and scatter His people because every facet of leadership representing the religious, social, judicial and political spheres committed apostasy by turning away from the word of God!

Jeremiah 2:8-9 says: “The priests did not say, ‘Where is the Lord?’ And those who handle the law did not know Me; the shepherds also transgressed against Me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that do not profit. Therefore I will yet contend with you, says the Lord, and with your sons’ sons I will contend.”

Jeremiah also declared that God would scatter His people by using the pagan nation of Babylon (the nation from the north) to judge His people, which eventually led to them being taken captive to Babylon and disinherited.

Jeremiah 1:14-15 says: “Then the Lord said to me: Out of the north calamity will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land. For I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, says the Lord. And they will come and they will set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls all around, and against all the cities of Judah.”

Thus God bypassed His religious and political hierarchy—the entire institution of leadership—and chose Jeremiah as the

only one to be His oracle!

Also, we see this principle during the days of Elijah several hundred years before they were scattered. At that time there was so much syncretism (King Ahab worshipped both Baal and Yahweh) that God used a remnant of 7,000 prophets preserved from the school of prophets set up by the prophet Samuel (many years before) as a sub-culture preserving the holy remnant who kept the word of the Lord and faith in Yahweh until a king arose who would restore the nation back to God (1 Kings 17-21)! But even godly kings like Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah were not enough to prevent the eventual disinheritance witnessed by Jeremiah.

Furthermore, we see God operating powerfully through the scattered remnant in Babylon. Daniel was used by God to transform the entire nation of Babylon (Dan. 1-6)! This shows us that God doesn't need all the political, social and ecclesial accoutrements to transform culture and promote His kingdom! He will even bypass the unity of His church and faith community if necessary to accomplish His purposes if His people forsake His law and compromise their faith by worshipping and serving God and manmade traditions!

Finally, by the time of John the Baptist, we see God totally bypassing the religious hierarchy of the restored nation of Israel which was then under Roman rule, including the Scribes and Pharisees, by revealing the birth of Messiah to the lowly shepherds at night (marketplace leaders). God was making a statement by bypassing the priests and religious leaders with this sacred announcement!

Also, we see St. Luke accentuating this point by mentioning all the priestly and political leaders before announcing that the word of God had bypassed them and instead came to an unknown person named John the Baptist in the wilderness (*wilderness* in this context represents that he was outside their context and power base).

Luke 3:1-4: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Caesar Tiberius, Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip was tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Traconitis, and Lysanias was the tetrarch of Abilene. Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He came into the region surrounding the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight."'"

Of course, John was the forerunner of Jesus who, as a carpenter, was outside the priestly clan of Aaron and was not a member of the Sanhedrin nor a political leader. Yet He suddenly appeared on the scene as a herald of Good News (Luke 4:18).

John 7:15 says Jesus was not a man of letters (He wasn't officially trained in the Scriptures by the accepted system of education run by the religious leadership) but was God the Son who came to bring the way, the truth and the life to the world (outside of the ecclesiastical or religious structure of His day). One of the most profound things Jesus ever said was that the religious traditions of men make the Word of God of no effect (Mark 7:13)!

Of course, I am still a proponent of church unity and understand it is something the Scriptures teach us to strive toward so we can function with the maximum amount of power and purpose! The body of Christ needs each part as shown in 1 Corinthians 12; Jesus prayed for His followers to be united in John 17:20-23; 1 Corinthians 1:10 teaches us not to be divided in the church; and Acts 2:44-47 and Acts 4:32-34 show that one of the primary reasons for the power of the early church was their love and unity. However, it is clear from the aforementioned narratives that God honors His name more than superficial and idolatrous unity.

Consequently, if the Protestant Reformation was a catalyst for the church to embrace the Scriptures as its highest standard of faith and life (2 Tim. 3:15,16); if the Reformation helped purge the church of religious idolatry (John 14:6, Acts 4:12); if the Reformation highlighted the gospel truth that salvation is through grace alone and not by individual works (Eph. 2:8,9); if the Reformation helped restore the biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:8, 9) and if the Reformation ultimately helps restore the body of Christ (including Roman Catholicism, Eastern orthodox, Anglican and beyond) back to the way of Christ and His apostles—then, in my opinion, it was worth it!

Next week I will deal with the advantages and disadvantages of the Protestant Reformation.