

# CHIEF MINISTRIES

September 2017

First generation Christianity did not see the local church as merely a classroom where believers were taught the scriptures or a hospital to care for God's hurting children. In fact, it was not seen so much as a place as it was an environment. It was an environment in which the Saints could fulfill a most remarkable destiny as being valued parts of the visible body of Christ on earth. *"From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows, and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."* (Ephesians 4:16) God never intended holiness to thrive in isolation. Everywhere believers went they bore the common mark of Jesus' words, *"All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."*

In an age where catchy words and slogans come and go so quickly, it is remarkable when one comes and stays. "Body life" has done just that. And with it has come a freshness to local churches which has revolutionized the lives of thousands of believers. If the church you attend isn't involved in "living" out the gospel, then perhaps you need to check your "pulse". I'm not talking about another program, seminary or class. I'm talking about rediscovering these long-lost chapters of the Bible. Take a minute and read 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4-5 and most especially, Romans 12:3-15 and chapter 13.

In place of the believer who returns home from Sunday morning service with the singular satisfaction that he has worshiped God because he heard the choir and took good notes on a fine expository sermon is that growing band of saints who have found that life transforming added dimension of the fellowship of the body in worship and in love. This, combined with a fresh awareness of the ministry and power of the Holy Spirit, has allowed God's people to taste once again of first generation Christianity.

Results too will be the same. Commitment to the authority of Scripture's has been strengthened in a deepening conviction that truth must be related to life. Separation from the world has shed its negative shroud and put on its much better fitting garments of light in the midst of darkness, genuine joy, genuine love, genuine purity. Evangelism has come alive because the Saints are no longer ashamed of the gospel. They have found it to be what it is - the power of God! Submission to authority is losing its legalistic sound as the concept of true spiritual eldership increases the opportunity for relationships in which the truth is shared "in love." The gradually developing, distinctive lifestyle which marked early Christianity is becoming easier to accept when believers begin to realize not only are they "not of this world," but they are also "not alone." Finally, worship is once again becoming truly God-centered when we can worship as the Bible instructs and our focus is on our Creator, the Triune God.

When worship is allowed to flourish, we may be sure that we will encounter a satanic counterfeit. It just so happens that spiritual blessing and spiritual warfare occupy the same dimension - "in heavenly realms" (Ephesians 1:3, 6:12).

Whenever God's truth begins to affect one's behavior - and it must - at that moment Satan has a brand-new area in which to work. Up to that point, he could divide and weaken God's people by corrupting truth, but now he can further his cause by counterfeiting experience. And since authentic Christian experiences is a very wonderful thing, it is terribly easy to develop an "experience menu" mentality in which we attempt to satisfy our hunger by whatever "spiritual" experience might happen to catch our attention.

In these days of greater openness to spiritual realities among the children of God, how desperately we need true under-shepherds who not only know the Scriptures and their God, but who deeply love and guard their flocks! Where are the pastors and chaplains that actually care?

These 5 distinctives of first generation Christianity scarcely tell it all. But I think they tell enough to at least get us on our way as to the “how” of holiness. And there is no time to waste. The glory of God demands it now.

How then should we live here on earth? How should we conduct ourselves? Those are questions Paul addresses in Ephesians 4 – 6, and we need to pay attention to the second half of his letter as much as the first half. You see our citizenship is in heaven, (Philippians 3:20) and we have a heavenly standing in Jesus, but we are also in this world, and there are things that God requires of us who are here - as beloved, redeemed children; as insiders, not as outsiders.

Peter describes our life on earth as the time of our exile (1 Peter 1:17), and he writes, “*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul*” (1 Peter 2:11). He also writes, “*If you call “Father” the one who judges everyone impartially according to what he has done, you must live in the fear of the Lord as long as you are strangers here.* <sup>v18</sup> *For you know that it was not with perishable things like silver or gold that you have been ransomed from the worthless way of life handed down to you by your ancestors,* <sup>v19</sup> *but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or defect.* (1 Peter 1:17-19 ESV)

What he is saying is that fleshly, worldly things are not for us. They are at war with our heavenly calling and our new nature in the Messiah, and because God has paid such a high price for our salvation, we need to live our lives here with reverential fear.

In the same way, because of our lofty calling and our heavenly position in Jesus, Paul urges us “*to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.*” (Ephesians 4:1) This was a repeated theme in his letters: “*The only thing that matters is that you continue to live as good citizens in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come to see you or whether I stay away, I may hear all about you-that you are standing firm in one spirit, struggling with one mind for the faith of the gospel,* (Philippians 1:27) *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,* <sup>v10</sup> *so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.* (Colossians 1:9-10 ESV). *We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory*”. (1 Thessalonians 2:12 ESV)

This means that we can walk in a manner unworthy of our high calling, and if Paul could exhort the Thessalonians as how they ought to walk and to please God (1 Thessalonians 4:1) - as they had already been doing, in keeping with his instructions - then it is possible to walk in a way that does not please God. And if Paul could urge the Ephesians not to “*grieve the Holy Spirit of God*” by their conduct, words and attitude (Ephesians 4:30), then it is possible to live and act in such a way that we do grieve the Holy Spirit.

But this is what we need to keep in mind: Paul and Peter are telling us these things because of our union with Jesus. They are exhorting us to please God in thought, word, and deed because we are new creations, because we are spiritually seated in heavenly places, because we are the objects of His grace not His wrath.

That’s why the author of Hebrews explains that when God disciplines us, He is treating us as children: *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. <sup>v6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” <sup>v7</sup> It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?<sup>v8</sup> If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.* (Hebrews 12:5-8 ESV)

Everything we read in Ephesians 1 and 2 is true and that is who we are in Jesus. God is simply saying to us, “In light of what I have done for you, and in light of your exalted standing as children of the heavenly Father and blood-bought, blood-washed saints - holy ones! - I want you to be very careful with how you live!”

This is the basis of Paul’s exhortation in the Corinthians: *What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I*

*will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>v17</sup> Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you. (2 Corinthians 6:16-17 ESV)*

We know for a fact that there were things that took place at Corinth that displeased the Lord - He certainly didn't love everything he saw there, He certainly wasn't thrilled with everything His people were doing there, and He certainly wasn't just singing their praises - but that didn't mean they weren't His precious, beloved children. It meant that because they had these promises, they needed to separate themselves from "*every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*"

Why can't we accept these two-fold spiritual realities at the same time? We are dearly loved by the Father and we are called to please Him. We are seated in heavenly places with Jesus and we need to live lives that reflect that on earth. God considers us to be redeemed saints and He sees our faults and blemishes. As Jesus Himself expressed with unmistakable clarity, "*Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.*" (Revelation 3:19) when He corrects us or rebukes us or disciplines us, it is because He loves us and is committed to us. That is the good news, and that is simply part of having a relationship with the Lord.

The fact that He is not the accuser of the brethren. He is not the condemner of the weak. He is not the author of despair. He is for us not against us and that's why He speaks correction into our lives. Can you feel the Father's love - even when it is stern in all of this? Can you find a place of security in which you can freely confess your sins to God and freely receive fresh cleansing and freely respond to the conviction of the Spirit? And can you take hold of the fact that He is the center of attention rather than us? We live for His glory and we belong to Him rather than Him being our celestial bellboy.

Paul's words to the Corinthians whom he addresses as, "*Those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints*" (1 Corinthians 1:2). He has glowing praise for them and expresses great confidence about their future, and in speaking this over them, he is certainly expressing God's heart: "*I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>v5</sup> that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—<sup>v6</sup> even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—<sup>v7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>v8</sup> who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (1 Corinthians 1:4-8 ESV)

Yet Paul also had sharp words of rebuke for the Corinthian believers and in this too he was reflecting God's heart. God was hardly pleased with some of what He saw in His beloved people and He certainly was not always singing their praises.

Paul wrote, "*In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good*" (1 Corinthians 11:17 NIV). And in terms of abuses at the Lord's Supper, he asked, "*Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not! (Verse 22 NIV)* Can we really believe that Paul, the source of the grace message was out of tune here?

*Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>v28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>v29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>v30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>v31</sup> But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>v32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32 ESV)*

Did God "love what He saw" when the Corinthians were getting sick or even dying because they partook of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner?

When Paul heard about the incestuous sin that was taking place in their midst, he wrote, "*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from you.*" (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). He even ordered that the offending, unrepentant brother be delivered "*to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord!*" (Verse 5). Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians

11:28; “A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup” again in 2 Corinthians 13:5 he wrote, “Examine yourselves”.

If God always sees us as perfectly holy and righteous in His sight and is never looking at our faults, why did Jesus rebuke fire out of the seven congregations in Asia Minor, saying repeatedly, “I know your works,” after which he pointed out the good things they had done and the sins they were committing.

To the believers in Ephesus Jesus said, “I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first” (Revelations 2:4); to the believers in Pergamum He said, “I have a few things against you,” before listing His grievances with them (verse 14) to the believers in Thyatira He said, “I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.” (Verse 20). He said to the church in Sardis, “I know your works, you have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.” (Revelations 3:1-2). Jesus does look at our works and sometimes He finds them incomplete, calling us to repent because of His great love for us. To the believers in Laodicea, to whom He said, “I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say I am rich and prospered and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretchedly poor, blind, and naked” (versus 15-17).

But here’s what we need to remember: God still loves us deeply even when He does see our flaws and failures, and rather than cast us off and condemn us, He calls us back to Himself. That’s the whole purpose of the Holy Spirit’s conviction and the reason for the Lord’s loving rebuke.

Think about it for a moment. As a parent, do you have to see your child as perfect and without fault to love him or her? Do you say to them when they have a bad day, “you’re not my child and I’m not your parent!”? Then why do we need to erect an un-biblical theology that states God doesn’t see our faults and blemishes, he only sees the cross, in order for us to feel loved and secure? We are accepted because of Jesus, and that’s the ground for our security. Now it is our holy privilege to walk worthy of that high calling, drawing near to God in confidence, “with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22)

And let’s remember that to each of these congregations addressed in Revelation 2-3, Jesus gave wonderful words of encouragement, including precious promises to overcomers (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12) culminating with verse 21 in chapter 3. “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father in His throne” (NIV) and those who overcame certainly brought joy to the Father’s heart. Without a doubt, they were the ones who pleased Him!

Paul wrote, “And find out what pleases the Lord” (Ephesians 5:10 NIV). “So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.” (2 Corinthians 5:9 NIV). “And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.” (Colossians 1:10 NIV). “Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.” “On the contrary, we speak as man approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please man but God, tests our hearts.” (1 Thessalonians 4:1, 2:4 NIV)

And the second half of Ephesians (chapters 4-6), Paul gives us specific instructions on how we are to live to please God, including these exhortations just in chapter 4: “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>v2</sup> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>v3</sup> make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3 NIV), “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” (Verse 15 NIV), “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.” (Verse 17 NIV), “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. <sup>v26</sup> In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>v27</sup> and do not give the devil a foothold. <sup>v28</sup> He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. <sup>v29</sup> Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. <sup>v30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the

day of redemption. <sup>v31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>v32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Versus 25-32 NIV)

It seems nowadays, when you call believers to live like this, you're immediately charged with "sin management" and "behavior modification", whereas Paul's heart and mine - is to say, Jesus has wonderfully redeemed us and transformed us by His grace and mercy, and we now belong to Him. Let's live lives that are worthy of His great name. Let's become like Him in thought, word and deed! Let's stop living in the old way of life, and let's live in the newness of life in the Spirit!"

*"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children <sup>v2</sup> and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. <sup>v3</sup> But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. <sup>v4</sup> Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. <sup>v5</sup> For of this you can be sure; no immoral, impure or greedy person---such a man is an idolater---has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. <sup>v6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. <sup>v7</sup> Therefore do not be partners with them. <sup>v8</sup> 4 you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. <sup>v9</sup> For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth <sup>v10</sup> and find out what pleases the Lord." (Ephesians 5:1-10 NIV)*

So, I'll stay with Jesus and Paul and the rest of the Scriptures here, confident that I have been accepted in Jesus, the beloved Son. (Ephesians 1:1-6) That the One who began a good work in me will bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6), that the Father has lavished His grace on me and called me His own (Ephesians 2:4-7), and that no one can bring a condemning accusation against me, since Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us (Romans 8:34).

Because of this we make it our business to please Him, bringing Him joy, not grief.....pride, not pain....always remembering the depth of His kindness towards us. For, "as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Psalms 103:13-14). And perhaps the most amazing thing of all is this: when you get to know Him intimately, He is really not hard to please.

Doesn't your heart burst with a holy desire to bring Him joy and to walk worthy of your high calling as a child of the Father, seated with Jesus in heavenly places? With Paul, I desire to say at the end of my life, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). And I can't wait for Him to say on that day, "Well done, my good and faithful servant..... Let's celebrate together! (Matthew 25:21 NLT)

I am driven and carried and captured by love. Are you?

Find out what pleases the Lord..... And do it!

## **Chief**

*If you want to know more about CHIEF Ministries or would like to be a part of this, please go to [www.chiefministries.com](http://www.chiefministries.com) and [www.chiefshouse.org](http://www.chiefshouse.org)*

*Christ's*

*Heart*

*In*

*Every*

*Felon*