

Part VI

The New Look

What would the church look like if we were to embrace a Cosmic Worldview; truly repent of our agape-love for the world; and begin to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind?

For openers, to “confess” means to agree with a charge against us. To “repent” is to then turn around and go in the opposite direction. It’s the [Ephesians 4:22-29](#) response where something negative is deliberately replaced by something positive. Christians often try to stop doing wrong without replacing it with the opposite, and then we wonder why we don’t have the victory! In this case our love for the world would be replaced by a love for God in what would become an extreme makeover from the inside out.

Here is some of what the church would look like after deep repentance. But why would we wait until troubles come, to ask God to begin to work these virtues, attitudes and practices in us? This is what He *always* wanted Christians to be! Unfortunately it will probably take the involuntary loss of our freedom and opportunity to get us to look toward Him enough to find the instruction and the strength to change, but life would be indescribably richer if we were to humble ourselves and pursue Him even now.

Further, I believe that as fear rises in America, many who are not now walking with God will look toward Him for hope. But how will they find Him? In the church? I’m sorry, but I believe that too often Christendom in America has given others reason to not want to be like us. Haven’t we frequently been judgmental, hypocritical, superficial, and/or legalistic? Have we shown them that we are Christians – by our love and unity? If that offends you, but please try to understand my heart before writing me off.

It is imperative that Christians in America take seriously our need to accurately represent God to those who don’t yet know Him – and that will require major change in the church as we now know it.

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20) The Mark of Authenticity

Love is to the sphere of human relationships what gravity is to the universe; being the unseen force that keeps all in harmonious motion according to creation design; and the absence of which creates disorder and devastation.

There is **nothing more difficult** for the old nature, nor more natural for the new, than love. Nothing better authenticates one's testimony of being born again.

If the church were to truly repent and turn to God, love, and the fruit of the Spirit in general ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)) would displace super-spiritual phenomena, possessions, doctrinal correctness, conformity to rules and other criteria which we now accept as marks of spirituality. As Jesus said in John 13:34-35: *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

Consider the power of love. It was because of love that Jesus became our Savior. Even when we were still ugly sinners, Christ died for us. ([Romans 5:7-9](#)) But it's also true that our agape-love for the world, instead of for God, is what got us into this fix in America. Love is powerful whether it is used in a godly way or otherwise.

Christian love is powerful for two reasons. First, it proves God's presence in us because nothing else could set us free from ourselves enough to give love in this way. Secondly, it touches the deepest need in others and draws them toward God in a way that nothing else does.

To love is to give. (For God so loved the world that He – gave!) We can only love others in the measure in which we have opened ourselves to God and received *His* love, thus finding our significance and wholeness in Him and being set free from selfishness. It is as Jesus said: *If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.* (John 14:23) When we're born again and filled with the Spirit, the God-shaped hole in us is filled with His love for us – and overflows to others.

We love God because He first loved us. When we truly believe that God loves us (even “me,” in spite of - - -), our inner defenses come crashing down. We surrender to Him; He makes us whole; and that enables us to give love to others!

Our honest assessment of how misdirected our love has been, and of how badly we have betrayed God by loving the world, would produce remorse that would totally transform the church. It would reflect the penitence of [II Corinthians 7:11](#).

And here's something else it would do. It would humble us and help us love and extend mercy to even the most broken people He brought to us, knowing that they could hardly have failed Him any more than we have! What would *that* do to the witness of the church?

21) The “Stuff”

Certainly we need to be responsible stewards of what God has entrusted to us. We don't just recklessly give it away. But there's also something to be said for the words of Jesus in [Luke 12:13-21](#). American-Christians *have* laid up treasures on the earth in a way that is directly contrary to His words here and in [Matthew 6:19-24](#), and the church has largely condoned that.

If we repented deeply, we would begin to divest ourselves of hundreds of millions, and even billions of dollars of hoarded personal wealth and would pour it into making God known to the ends of the earth. (That's what He entrusted it to us for!)

Every prisoner could hear about God's love. Orphans and widows would be cared for in a Biblical way. Pregnancy Care Centers would have funds to serve women in need; to communicate the realities of abortion and post abortion; and to minister to those who have made that terrible mistake. Missions would be able to reach into the darkest corners of the earth with the light of God's Word.

Hands of mercy would never be empty as they reach toward those who have been devastated by natural disaster and war.

Today about 200 million people do not have God's Word in their own language and it would sooo please Him for us to do more about that. We could, and it would only take a billion dollars to have translation work in progress in the remaining 2300 languages.

“Generosity” would be redefined and would be based more upon what we kept than what we gave. We might regularly buy a few extra groceries to share with someone in need, or slip some dollars into the hand of one whose need God shows us. We would embrace the saying of the 16th Century Anabaptists: “What is mine is the Lords when my brother has need.” Giving would become as natural to us as hoarding is now – and it would be a whole lot more fun!

Christians would use the gifts, abilities and resources that God entrusted to them, to bless others. Entrepreneurs would quietly do what was innate to their business, to extend the Kingdom of God both locally and around the world.

We would become more discerning about where we gave, too. We would give more to those who express God's heart to the broken and destitute, and less to fill the coffers of already rich leaders of glamorous ministries who have tickled our ears and soothed our consciences about loving money and possessions.

The ultimate test for many would be in Luke 18:22: *You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.* I'm not sure how many American-Christians Jesus would say that to, but He would probably at least ask many of us to give to others in such measure that we would need to depend on His provision for our future. Doing *that* might just be what we need to break our bondage to materialism.

The magnitude of our personal debt reveals the depth of our materialism and our lack of godly contentment. Even worse, we have accepted credit card interest rates which violate any sense of godly financial responsibility. Our debt will be one of the tools that Satan uses to tempt Christiana toward compromise in a time of trial.

As we repented we would also find ourselves **taking steps toward “simplicity.”** That’s a very subjective word and is relative to each person’s situation, but every one of us could move toward finding more of our wellbeing in our walk with God and less in what we have formerly trusted. I understand how tough that is, but I also know the reward of being set free, little by little. Every step away from the world and the things of the world can be a step toward God – and that is a wonderful thing!

I regularly rub shoulders with “plain folks,” i.e. Amish and conservative Mennonites. They have a certain advantage over many of us because they have already learned how to say “no” to many of the things that the rest of us consider essential. They have drunk less deeply of opportunity and are not as intoxicated by it.

That is commendable, and while plain dress and other symbols of simplicity have potential to remind us of and give testimony to our commitment to God, I would respectfully caution them in this way; “Please be aware of your vulnerability to depending on your plain dress, simple lifestyle or other symbols of separation from the world, to make you truly men and women of God. Beware of the dangers of giving yourself to a religious culture which becomes a substitute for heart surrender to God and finding your life, identity, and spiritual security in Him alone. It’s a heart issue and it comes down to one thing and only one thing – one’s relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ our Savior. Creating and obeying rules which are designed to increase your chances of winning or maintaining God’s favor will actually distance you from Him if they move you from a faith-based relationship to a works-based religion.”

Wealth would lose its ability to automatically give people respect and power in the church. We would now honor those whom God honors, i.e. those who serve with humility; who give without needing to receive in return; and who are otherwise marked by Christlike character – without regard for their financial status in the world. *That* would be radical!

The church would be exponentially more powerful and effective as we turned our agape-love away from the world and toward God. We would find ourselves serving Him in dramatic new ways. As we were set free from bondage to the world and the distortion and clutter that it brings to our life, we would see with clear eyes; hear with open ears; think with unclouded minds; and move with brave new hearts and an untainted conscience. We would be empowered by God Himself and would go into all the world in a way that brought [Matthew 28:18-20](#), [Luke 24:46-49](#) and [Acts 1:8](#) together as we have never known.

22) The Church

Pastors would prepare the flock for hard times, equipping us to look to God for our significance, hope and provision. They would focus on our *relationship* with Him – far beyond a set of beliefs or practices; religious culture; or obedience to rules.

They would challenge us to pursue meaningful, sustainable, trust relationships with other Christians, as discussed in Chapter 27-29.

Overall, the primacy of the church (the institution) would yield to the urgency to build the Church (the Body of Christ on the earth, a living organism bearing His image; led by the Holy Spirit; and dedicated to His agenda). Our focus on the institutional church, that is, our denominations, facilities, programs and so forth would become secondary. They would become servants and not masters in the overall scheme of things.

That would bring profound change. As I've said and will continue to say, this kind of shift would move us toward what we really ought to have been all along.

We would respect our pastors and give them a place of influence in our life, and oversight in our relationship to the institution. We would give them the role of “shepherd” to us and invite them to actively lead us into a deeper walk with God. We would seek men who come alongside us and nurture our walk with God, and would move away from those who try to play God to us. (A pastor has authority “over” you in your relationships and activities in the institutional church, but some inappropriately view themselves as needing to be between you and God in your spiritual pilgrimage.)

We would also want to be prepared for the day in which the pastor might not be there.

There is a reason for the large and growing **non-churched Christian community**. The church and the Church *can* be two very different things. It *is* true that the institution sometimes hinders Christians even when it intends to do otherwise. However, while I've read some of the books and heartedly concur with most of the observations, I don't see that they validate the conclusion that many reach, i.e. that we only need God and don't have to be in deliberate fellowship with others.

The Church is truly a body, with parts, and those parts must function in harmony with each other for their mutual benefit. Paul speaks of that in [I Corinthians 12:12-31](#) and it is a foundational principle of godly living and fruitful ministry. We were made for fellowship. The Greek word *koinonia*, which is often translated into our English “fellowship,” means to partner with others or to share in life with them.

You may need to step out of a given institutional church if it is a hindrance to your pursuit of the heart of God, but beware of the potential for an attitude of superiority that tempts you to think you don't need to be in active, give-and-receive relationship with others in the Church.

Why have Christians always gathered together when persecution came; often in secret and under threat of death if caught; sometimes in caves or under a tree in the forest? It's because we need each other. We need the variety of gifts. Each of us contributes to the other.

We humans so often swing from one excess to another. In this case the awareness of how deeply the church has become an institution to be preserved, instead of a life-giving body to serve, has moved some to deny the necessity of the gathered local Church. The two extremes are equally unhealthy and neither will enable Christians to stand in the day to come.

I know that none-churched Christians tire of being reminded of Hebrews 10:24-25: *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* The fact is, "The Day" is approaching and God gave us that scripture for a purpose. It is not an isolated principle, but is harmonious with all of scripture; with man's creation design; with the New Testament Church model; and with the nature of the Godhead Itself!

Consider also [Acts 2:42-47](#) and [4:23-33](#). Note the results of the gathering of believers who were united in their pursuit of the heart of God, and who were willing to abandon their individualism in that effort. That is *Church*, and it won't happen in today's typical American church or in the non-churched community.

A recurring theme in the church today is "**the coming revival in America.**" However, I see two problems in the way it is often portrayed. First, Christians seem to assume that this revival is for "them," meaning the unsaved, and I insist it is for us first. As we're told in I Peter 4:17: *For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* American-Christians have little to say to the world until we clean up our own act.

Secondly, I don't believe that the coming revival is to restore America. It is to restore the Church.

There are "prophets" among us who declare peace, prosperity and revival for America, with little pain or personal cost. They present no urgency to repent deeply now or to repair the breaks in the walls of our hearts and of the church. The message is that we need to pray and have faith and God will do it. [Ezekiel 13:3-10](#) speaks of such prophets and what He thinks of them!

23) Unity

Denominational distinctives which now separate us would fade as we embraced a Cosmic Worldview. Unity would become that which Jesus prayed for in John 17:22-23 (below), which is based on oneness of will and purpose.

It would be rooted in our common surrender to our Lord Jesus Christ at the foot of the cross, which is not at all related to the ungodly inclusiveness of our day. We would unite in our commitment to make Him known and to expose the enemy, and would be empowered by His presence as we together went about His business.

We would lay down the secondary issues which now separate us. Theological differences, cultural expression, our “thou shalt not’s” and more would become preferences which help individuals understand and walk out their faith, but would not divide us. When pressed, most Christians agree that these are not “in or out” issues regarding one’s presence with God forever, so why do we act like they are?

In authentic unity we would recognize that our personal theological package is only part of the expression of God’s heart in our community. No one denomination or local assembly fully represents Him. We would begin to bless those whom we have previously viewed as our competitors or even adversaries. We would humbly give and receive in relationships with others, as long as they embrace the basic tenets of Christianity and sincerely seek to live for Jesus. The basic tenets are “those which orthodox Christianity has agreed on through the history of the church.”

We might enjoy a given **Bible translation** but would maintain unity with those who chose another one. The “King James only” element of the church is one of the most divisive. It disregards the fact that billions in the world don’t even read English, and that the translation is no more authorized by God than other translations.

No translation is perfect, including the King James, and God is able to make Himself known to all who seek Him regardless of which they use. It is certainly true that more people have been driven away from God and the church by the dogmatism and separatist attitude of KJV only folks, than have been kept in truth by its virtues.

Many trustworthy and enjoyable translations are available.

Here’s what Jesus said about the effect that such unity would have upon the myriads who want to know God but are confused and turned off by the bickering among Christians: *I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.* John 17:22, 23

“Glory” is the measure of excellence that something has above that which is around it. When we Christians humble ourselves and bless each other, we will be marked by glory that will convince the world of God’s love. They will know that nothing short of His power could have done that and they will want Him too!

24) Bible Reading and Prayer

Many Christians suffer debilitating guilt because of an inadequate devotional life, and there are several causes for that.

I believe the main reason is that reading the Bible and talking with God are seen more as Christian duties than as normal and appealing components of our everyday experience. Further, they are part of the spiritual or Cosmic side of things, which we live with little awareness of. We are conscious of the earthly dimension and often don't connect the two except in times of crisis.

In true revival we will center on God, and communion with Him will flow naturally as we find our significance and purpose in Him. We will recognize that we are truly His offspring and will *"live and move and have our being in Him,"* as the writer says in Acts 17:28.

He will be the beginning and the end of our day and the sustaining power between. Our minds will go to Him in periods of personal need or concern for others, and in times of blessing and joy, and we will talk with Him.

We will pause for a few minutes to chat with Him through our day as one now meets a friend at the proverbial water cooler. Reading the Word will be as normal as sitting down to read the paper or watch the news "for a few minutes." It is essentially impossible to walk victoriously without regular, personal, fellowship with and worship of God. The battle is simply too strong!

We will do it because of the hunger of our soul, realizing that we are unable to sustain a level of spiritual vitality without it any more than we can maintain physical strength without food. As our eyes are raised toward God we will want to partake more and more deeply of the riches He offers to those who worship Him. It will become privilege instead of duty. Jesus needed that – how much more do we?!

God's Word will become active and alive to us as it connects with our everyday life in a way it never did before. The Old Testament will transition from being primarily history, to become a practical, instructive and life-giving account of how God moves among man – then and now. He will speak to us deeply about Himself; us; and the world we live in. It's good stuff!

Time with God will become time with a friend. An encourager. One who makes life better for us and Whose presence warms us to the core even in otherwise chilling circumstances. As God's Word and our communication with Him become natural to daily life, Christians will be released from the frustration and guilt of the ugly "should" which now plagues so many.

Intercessors will be recognized and honored. We will see them as a ministry among us and each believer will move freely in the level of prayer-fellowship with God that He calls us to, without comparing ourselves among ourselves.

25) A New View of Suffering

Troubles and suffering are typically viewed as inconvenient and undesirable interruptions to the normal Christian life of health, comfort and abundance.

They are seen as inherently negative and the assumption is that we deserve better. A feeling of guilt or shame typically accompanies them because of the thought that we must have done something wrong to deserve them. Our attitude is based on a self-centered, earthbound perspective and our hope is to pray them away quickly.

A revived church will see **suffering from God's point of view**. It might represent His purifying fire to set us free from affections/addictions which hinder our advancing with Him. I Peter 4:1, 2 says: *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. 2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*

Suffering can be part of God equipping us with insights and resources so that we can serve others better, as Paul says in [II Corinthians 1:3-7](#). Maybe it is His act of mercy to get us ready for something that, in His foreknowledge, He knows lies ahead. Possibly we've made some bold statements and He's proving us. Consider I Peter 1:6, 7: *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

There are many, many reasons that God allows us to experience difficulties and they take on an altogether different perspective when we have the humility to look at them through a Cosmic Worldview and from a humble heart.

James speaks from a Cosmic Worldview when he says: *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.* That's about as relevant to the American Christian experience as [Matthew 5:10-12](#) when read through the lenses of the old nature and its earth-bound perspective.

However, James isn't playing with our minds. He continues: *because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* (James 1:2-4) And then there's v12: *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.* That's a fantastic ending but even then the process is one that many Christians don't want to think about too much!

Elaine and I have walked through some deep waters through the years. We have come to see that God is always, *always* ready to make something beautiful out of something ugly. It is as Joseph said in Genesis 50:20: *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done.*

Suffering is a servant of joy. The best things in life come through the most difficult things in life. If men take something from you, God will give you something better. The refiners' fire is hot, but having some of the chaff burnt off is liberating.

Tearing free from our agape-love for the world, and from childish expectations in our relationships with others, is something like ripping a very sticky bandage off of a very hairy chest. However, as we “find ourselves” in relation to God and things eternal, stuff of the earth will have diminished appeal and their loss will become less painful. We will even be able to accept the rejection of people, including friends and family, because of the measure in which we have experienced the acceptance of God and found our significance in Him. It might be useful to consider that possibility.

I believe that suffering will become a practical subject in the days ahead, and it will be much to our advantage if we can begin to embrace a God-perspective toward it.

I Peter 5:6-11 offers some key truths which God showed Elaine, and she passed on to me in a very difficult time in 1979. They have become a rock for us to stand on several times along the way and they could become the same for you. *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

I can't conclude without **I Peter 2:20b-23**: *20b But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* Isn't that an awesome, powerful, deeply touching testimony? And isn't it only possible for those who have a Cosmic Worldview?

I've not given many lists of scriptures in this material but I will here. Read through this series and see what it does to your perception on suffering: [Psalm 119:65-68](#); [Proverbs 17:3](#); [Romans 5:3-5](#); [Romans 8:16-17](#); [Hebrews 2:9-11](#); [Hebrews 5:8-9](#); [Hebrews 12:1-13](#); [I Peter 3:13-17](#); [I Peter 4:1-2](#); [I Peter 4:12-19](#). Meaty stuff, and there's lots more!