

## Part VII

### The Dividing Line

“Religion” and even “God” are not where the lines will fall when things get tough. America has become inclusive enough that there is plenty of room for them. Rather, it will be the person and the name of Jesus.

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## 26) The Name

Those who declare as truth Jesus' words in John 14:6: *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*, will find themselves at odds with the masses and even with many in the church.

Already many American-Christians have abandoned the core truths of John 3 (below) in favor of giving equal place to other world religions. Is it significant that Matthew 7:1: *Do not judge, or you too will be judged*, has replaced John 3:16 as the scripture that Americans know best?

Consider how these words of Jesus in John 3 fit the tenor of world (and even American) religious minds: *16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. - - - 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. - - - 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.*

We're speaking of Jesus the central figure of the Bible and the pivotal figure of history; Jesus of Nazareth, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; Jesus, who is eternally God with the Father and the Holy Spirit; Jesus, who came to earth and took on a human body and died on a cross to bear the penalty for our sins, so that we could have fullness of life now and spend eternity in heaven with Him instead of eternity in Hell with Satan; Jesus, who was buried, was raised from the dead by the power of God on the third day, walked among men, ascended to heaven and now sits at the Father's right hand to intercede for us; Jesus, who is coming again to take us home to be with Him forever. Jesus, before Whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord. Yes, *that* Jesus.

Do you sense how deeply offensive such an exclusive position is to those who embrace the inclusive spirit which has spread across America and around the world? What lies ahead for Christians who humbly but firmly stand on these truths?

[Matthew 10:16-39](#) is an excellent text for pastors who want to prepare their flock for things to come. Isn't v34 the pivotal truth there?: *Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*

When we use the term "the name of Jesus," we're speaking of more than the name of one person to distinguish them from another. Instead, we're identifying all that Jesus is and everything that His name implies and covers, as in John 1:12-13: *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

Jesus is respected by most faiths (even Islam) as a good man and one who symbolizes peace. Isn't it the irony of ironies that the declaration of "the Name of Jesus" has become a sword which divides!? Consider the major, controversial issues of the day and see how many are rooted in what "the Name" represents.

**A sober reality** is that historically it has been the institutional church that rejected and persecuted Christians who were going deeper with God. Characteristics of institutions are that they offer security and ways of doing things, and they have power to assure their ability to continue doing so. An inherent risk is that this power can easily be used against those who appear to threaten their authority and control by proposing the need for change.

Christians who pursue God with new vigor must communicate humbly and respectfully with their pastor. They must listen carefully to his counsel. They must also be prepared to continue in fellowship with likeminded brothers and sisters without the affirmation of their pastor or others whom they have previously looked to for support. That is a fine line to walk and it must be approached with a Christlike blend of boldness and meekness.

It is a fact of history that the Catholic Church persecuted those who embraced the Protestant Reformation. But then when the Anabaptist Reformation (Radical Reformation) emerged in the 1520's, the Anabaptists were hunted down and killed by the Protestant state churches!

History offers few examples of Godly living that are as authentic as the Anabaptists of the 1500's. Google "Anabaptist Reformation" or "Anabaptist persecution" and see if you're not inspired to deepen your own commitment! They were as close to the Hebrews 11 definition of "faithful" as you can get!

**Acts 4** brings together much of what this manuscript is about. Consider Peter's bold and exclusive message in vv10-12: *It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'* 12 *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*

When Peter's declaration was rejected, he and John were threatened and told to remain silent, to which they replied: *19b Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*

But read on. Their boldness was followed by their gathering with other believers, and seeking the heart of God. He answered and led them into a lifestyle that enabled them to move with Him at a new level. There is a kind of balance here which must be kept in mind by those who want to be bold for God!

## 27) The Options

Much of the American-Christian's sense of who we are, and of what "the good life" means, is connected to our being American. As change takes place in the days ahead, some Christians will turn toward God and others will turn away from Him. They don't know Him well enough to love and trust Him in the tough times.

We will be challenged from two directions, i.e. economic opportunity and religious freedom. The diminishment or loss of economic opportunity will throw many American-Christians for a spin because it has been so much at the center of their personal identity and sense of wellbeing.

The diminishment or loss of free speech and religious freedom is already happening and will increase. Even now it is a crime under anti-hate laws in several countries to declare homosexuality to be sin and America isn't far from the same.

**Both darkness and light will increase** in the days ahead, and the light of truth will provoke a violent reaction from the darkness of lies. Consider II Corinthians 2:14-16: *But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?* The aroma of God's presence in us will encourage those who seek Him, but it will inflame those who are rejecting Him.

Christians will have several choices as the days grow darker. One option will be to lift our eyes toward God and things eternal; finding our identity, and our sense of purpose and well-being there. We will become much more intimate with Him and things of this earth will mean less and less as their power over us is broken. The ecstasy of this intimacy will trivialize any price we need to pay.

**Another path and one that many Christians will follow**, is to give ourselves to movements which make us feel spiritual without needing to deal with our love for the world. God *is* making Himself known in wonderful ways, and that will increase as the storm grows. I also believe that things "new" which come from personal brokenness before God and intimacy with Him, are more likely to be authentic than those which come in large gatherings with spectacular public displays of power.

I am skeptical of the "revivals" that are taking place here and there where spirituality is often measured more by spectacular demonstrations of power than by deep inner change of affections and lifestyle.

You can mark my word on this. True revival will not come through a man or woman. Many thought that God would use several recent revival personalities to bring world revival. Christians will continue to exalt such persons, who will continue to disappoint them.

Revival will come as individuals turn to Jesus in a time of need, and no man or woman will be at the helm. He will not need to share that glory with another and it is only the vanity and shallowness of the church that keeps Christians looking to a person to lead them into revival.

Revival will come from the contrite heart and brokenness which follow the saint's encounter with Jesus in the closet – not the well publicized personalities, platforms and spiritual fireworks which Christians now flock to. It will be Jesus and the grass roots. Wait and see – and in the meantime don't be deceived. Satan has *his* game, too.

Still another predictable option is that as fear increases, **Christians will look to men** instead of to God for their answers and their hope.

We need leaders among us and their role is to help us move toward God. However, many Christians are weak, and thus vulnerable to even well-intentioned leaders who cannot resist the temptation to ascend in power over them. The core motivations of both political and church leaders will be put to the test and many will fail. Its part of the opportunistic nature of the old nature! Didn't Jesus say that false prophets will arise and many will follow them? Consider Matthew 24:10-13: *At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

And then there's [Ezekiel 33:30-32](#), a rather fascinating scenario to consider. I believe that with the direction things are taking in the church it could be a very common response. Read it – it's going to happen and we're all vulnerable!

I've observed for years that Christians like to talk about how awful things are, but nothing changes. We somehow think that by talking in concerned tones about the direction of our nation and/or the church, we have declared ourselves "good" and thus relieved ourselves of responsibility to examine our own lives or to pursue God more seriously! Maybe we could call them "the [Isaiah 29:13-14](#) folks."

Finally, there's the even less honorable response that some Christians will choose when the going gets rough. They are **the ones who will betray** family and friends.

## 28) Betrayal

Jesus said that a day would come when even those closest to us could betray us. You can think of “brother” and others here as familial and/or those in the church.

Consider Matthew 10:21-22: *Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 22 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

Could such a thing occur among American-Christians in the foreseeable future? Has it already happened to countless followers of Jesus through the centuries and is it happening at various places around the world right now?

I was laying in bed one night some years ago with **a question rolling around in my head**. I was a pastor and was concerned about the approaching day when our American freedoms will be taken away. The question was, "At what point will Christians compromise their faith and their relationship with each other in a time of difficulty?" I felt inclined to go to my study and write. The answer that came to me was simply, "The point of compromise will be the point of affection."

Think of an “affection” as whatever we would wrap our arms around, and cling to, and hold close to us at the expense of something else. If independence; material things; reputation; the church institution; freedom from pain and suffering; position; power; our job or business; or security of some kind, for example, are the object of our greatest affection, we will be tempted to compromise relationships in order to preserve them. It’s that simple.

Persons in places of position in banking, business, and even church administration will acquiesce to demands, rationalizing that by doing so they will be able to continue in that position themselves, or keep that institution in action.

**In America we have come to believe** that pain, want and suffering are to be avoided at almost any cost. So much of the American way of life is geared to protect us from such. Insurances and reliance upon drugs have helped condition us that way.

In the hour of trial many will cave in without realizing they are compromising on spiritual issues. Often they will actually believe that they are doing what is right. By doing so however, they *will* deny Christ as Lord and could betray those of His Body, the Church.

**Are you** and the Christians you are close to, prepared to make the right choices – even at personal cost?

## 29) Trustworthy?

One of the most powerful deterrents to compromise will be deep, personal relationships among Christians. The present spirit of independence and individualism will contribute to compromise because it is so self-centered.

How many Christians do you think have ever asked themselves, “Which of my friends would pay the price for me rather than betray me?” Have *you* asked that? Do you know?

Do you have friends whom you could depend on to remain loyal to you even if it meant suffering or death to them? Who would hide or protect you if those who meant you harm because of your stand for Christ, came after you? And to whom would you express the same loyalty?

I say frankly that many Christians today would fail such a test. Can you recognize meaningful friendships that you know *wouldn't* hold up to that? Can you candidly identify those who warmly greet you on Sunday morning and maybe even hug you and say “God bless you,” but who could quickly find higher loyalties in tough times?

**Trustworthiness is not** based on appearance of spirituality or on ones' testimony. There's a lot of “fluff” out there. Nor is it based on agreement on Christian doctrine or practice. Many who embrace the same theological package as you; and go to the same church; and worship with similar expression; and serve on the same committees – will betray you when push comes to shove. I'm sorry, but it's true.

Both loyalty and betrayal will come from unexpected places. Consider how in the Rwanda genocide of 1994, a Hutu would massacre a Tutsi who had been a lifelong friend, but in another case a Hutu would risk his life by hiding a Tutsi who wasn't even a close friend. There will be persons whose strong, core human decency will empower them to remain loyal longer than some of the super-saints in the church. We don't always know the trigger points in others that will cause them to turn their hearts – or their backs, toward us. We will be disappointed but let's not be dismayed. God is still with us.

**We learn to trust or not trust others** on the basis of knowing them. And we know people we spend time with. Christians must begin to quietly but deliberately forge relationships that will sustain a test of loyalty.

One way is to have people over to your home or go out to eat together, and as God leads, attempt to move the conversation along serious lines. Or observe your Sunday School class or a Bible study and ask God to show you someone there who might enter into a more serious, one-on-one discussion. Christians are far too superficial to know each other to any depth. We also learn to know others by playing or working together, but at some point we need to get beyond the superficial.

Here are several practical points as you consider who might (or might not) be a loyal brother or sister. Ask God to help you see the real person inside them. Be assured that there will be some surprises – both ways!

- Look for a shared, life-shaping commitment to Jesus, where your fellowship with each other is rooted in your common fellowship with God, as in I John 1:3.
- Those who have already made sacrificial life-choices based on their walk with Him have demonstrated His place in their life in a way that gives you some clues. The flip side is as true.
- Personal integrity. Who are the people of their word? Who can you depend on in the little things? Who’s “Yes is yes and no, no?” Learn from that.
- Who demonstrates consistency between their life inside the church and in everyday life?
- Who greets you warmly but then talks negatively about you behind your back?

I propose that one of the most trustworthy elements in the church will be those whom we sometimes consider marginal Christians. They hold themselves back from the mainstream church-going crowd and hang around the fringes. And something else - they sport more Harley t-shirts and tattoos than the in-crowd does. The fact is that many of them hold back because they are too “real” to give themselves to the superficiality and hypocrisy of the larger church.

I say confidently that when the going gets tough, the tough will get going. Wait and see – they will be the most trustworthy group among us. In the meantime, they have more depth than we give them credit for and there’s a lot we could learn from them.

**It’s also true** that in tough times we’ll find ourselves joined at the heart to persons from Christian persuasions and practices that we now find it so easy to set aside. Those secondary theological issues; the cultural stuff; the symbols of faithfulness; the religious traditions – all will fall away as our lives merge under our Lord Jesus Christ. The adamant teetotaler may be sheltered by the one who enjoys a glass of wine. The one who still needs his “puff” might protect the one who formerly judged him so harshly. And vice versa.

**I am not insisting that these things will happen** in the very near future. What I am saying is that Jesus said they would take place and the necessary ingredients are now present and growing exponentially – but it will only happen when God says “Go.” In the meantime, are we ready, or willing to get ready?

Let’s not be naïve. These are things to be considered quietly and prayerfully. And maybe it’s something that we should talk about – at the right time and in the right setting.