

A Clarion Call

Dear Pastor,

- Why is church not even in the top 12 places Christian look for spiritual growth?
- Have you experienced broken relationships within your church?
- Are families in your church facing brokenness or even divorce?
- Have you seen youth looking to the occult?
- Is your church seen as a vital component of community life?
- Why is Islam making inroads into what used to be a Christian Nation?
- Why is our nation viewing Christians as terrorists and removing any terror reference to the religion of Islam within our military and Homeland Security?

These and many more questions are answered Biblically in a comprehensive letter “***A Clarion Call to the Church***” that is yours to download without obligation.

If you do not see that God’s Word “as originally given” is without error, then this may not be something you will want to read (*although we encourage it*). God says you will only be offended. This letter with supporting documentation is intended for Pastors in Bible Believing Churches.

The letter will prepare you to assist your congregation in gaining a Biblical approach to healing relationships while restoring full vitality to your church.

A book will be released in 2014 that will provide believers with God’s Plan for Healing Relationships. The reason for this letter is that true victory in restoring relationships can only be achieved through the ***local church***, and unless the church is willing to accept its responsibility, the bride will remain spotted, wrinkled and blemished. You must be intentional to assure the bride is ready for the bridegroom!

If it is not attached, you may download letter from website: www.christianadr.org

Sincerely,

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A Clarion Call to the Church

Dear Pastor,

Counseling people facing divisions is increasingly difficult. Surveys reveal we are now in a post Christian era. This paper will provide an often ignored biblical solution. This is a Clarion call: God has said His Judgment must begin with the church, **1 Peter 4:17**.

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

Thank-you for taking your valuable time to determine whether there may be places where the intentional focus of your ministry may benefit by learning more about the Ministry of Reconciliation an essential *(but often ignored)* component of God's heart for the church.

Restoring relationships God's way will never be carried out perfectly *(we are imperfect human beings)*, but God always blesses when we are obedient to His Word. God examines our hearts, and He will honor any steps you undertake. When starting the ministry we were almost clueless what God wanted to accomplish, but time after time He restored hopeless relationships and helped us learn more about how He wanted the ministry conducted. Likewise, He will also meet you right where you are *(should you be led to implement this ministry)*. Can applying the ministry of reconciliation within your church actually produce results? We have seen that when God's Word is presented, the people want to hear God's Word. When the local church is committed to apply the ministry, reconciliation generally occurs. The following eight (8) testimonies will help you grasp the potential available when the ministry of reconciliation is implemented.

1. A pastor had made several grievous errors in his ministry. We were called to bring the sermon on the Sunday when church leadership planned to accept his resignation. To focus the attention of the congregation on unity within the church, we changed the order of service and delivered a message about the importance of reconciliation prior to worship. Following the sermon communion was served with the admonition that each person needed to seek forgiveness from those they had offended prior to partaking. The head Elder *(who had pressed for the resignation of the pastor)* was unable to take communion that day and left the church. We ended the service with praise and worship. The resignation was not requested that day. About a year later the former Elder came and sought forgiveness from the pastor. This reconciliation allowed the pastor to submit his resignation to the church the next Sunday. He had now completed his responsibility to the lost sheep that had been unable to take communion. This will be discussed in more detail later in this letter.
2. The board of directors of a national Para-church ministry needed to address a serious issue about financial irregularities within the ministry and consulted with us. The matter was handled biblically. The person in charge made right what had occurred and resigned that post showing heartfelt repentance. That person *(who was also a pastor)* went on and carried out a ministry that touched many thousands of lives. The matter had been resolved in private and only that board knew what had occurred, but with repentance and forgiveness that Pastor served the Lord greatly leaving a mighty legacy that absent Biblical reconciliation might have been destroyed.

The question is often asked, *Can the principals of reconciliation be applied apart from the church?* The answer is a qualified yes *(only utilizing **Matthew 18:15**)*, since establishing God's Word requires the

involvement of a local church.

3. A deputy sheriff who learned about our ministry asked if we could work with two couples who had filed felony charges against each other. Neither of the couples attended church. We asked a local pastor to open his church for the reconciliation. In this case the only option for restored relationship rested on prayer and their private meeting since there was no church relationship. After completing an orientation (*a time of teaching preparing for private reconciliation*), we indicated that the two couples needed to address their differences in private after praying together. There were several times the voices behind the closed door escalated and as we interceded in prayer the voices decreased. After a while it became very quiet and upon entering the room, we found they had totally resolved their differences. Afterwards, we impressed upon each of the husbands their responsibility to assure that their families became involved in a church fellowship. Subsequently the deputy indicated that this one session had apparently solved our local Hatfield -McCoy dispute. It is our hope that both couples eventually did become members of a local church.
4. A strong agnostic young man accepted Jesus at the conclusion of his criminal legal case handled by my law office. He explained that he had taught his wife so well that she was totally opposed to his new faith. We advised him to pray with his wife. He recounted that she had been sick and after great trepidation and personal prayer, he finally approached her and said: *I have to do the hardest thing I have ever done*. She asked: *What are you going to do, beat me?* He asked to pray with her, and she extended her hand from under the blankets. He recounted that after fifteen years of marriage he thought he knew about intimacy but as he prayed with his wife he found the true meaning of intimacy. They became members of a local church. God provided the blood of His son to bring victory for each of us who appropriate it, but God uses the role of a witness such as the young man who discovered prayer with his wife that both humbled him and brought a new meaning to intimacy. His testimony has touched many marriages, **Revelation 12:11**
And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.
5. One of the many reconciliations where that former agnostic's testimony assisted restoration occurred when addressing the failing marriage of a pastor. As we carried out the orientation session, it became clear that the pastor had been unable to pray with his wife. The above testimony was shared with the Pastor and his wife. When they met in private to address the question of prayer in their marriage, we found tears flowing and their marriage being miraculously restored. Our ministry never needed to be involved with that marriage again. The testimony by a former agnostic helped heal their marriage.

Our forthcoming book *Healing Relationships - God's Way* gives many lessons we learned about how people facing division can effectively restore their relationships in private as commanded by God. This letter addresses your responsibility to implement the ministry in your church.

6. We learned a hard lesson about not assuming the authority given to the church (*even when requested*). The hierarchy of a denomination where a Pastor was facing divorce requested our ministry assume sole responsibility for the reconciliation. After the orientation the wife refused to proceed with the ministry and we had to assume the responsibility of speaking to her what God's Word said about the direction she was going. It was very difficult since that should not have been our responsibility but that of the church

hierarchy. This case caused us to adopt a policy to never accept such a delegation. Regrettably, the marriage ended in divorce. The Pastor eventually remarried and continued in ministry, and even authored an article about the importance of the ministry of reconciliation. Approximately four years later we received a call from his former wife, who said, everything we had ministered happened and requested our prayers, and asked us to be part of her seeking the Lord's forgiveness.

7. A husband had filed for divorce. The pastor (*who had been working with the couple*) had taken a new charge and a new pastor unfamiliar with the ministry was present. It was unusual as there were six witnesses plus the pastor. In a very unique move of God (*perhaps a word of knowledge*), the witnesses (*after prayer*) pronounced that the husband was in adultery. He said that was a lie and stormed out of the church. The Pastor being new to the pastorate said he could only show love and did not feel he could exercise church discipline. It turned into one of the nastiest divorces, I have ever seen. The wife kept asking: *Where is God?* After leaving that church, he took the young girl, (*with whom he was in adultery*), to another church. At the request of the wife, we confronted that pastor who also refused to exercise church discipline, but only wanted to show God's love. After ten years of not hearing from the man, I read that he was in jail. While shoveling snow, I was impressed to call him in jail. He immediately requested my wife and I to visit him. On arriving he threw his arms around us and sought our forgiveness since everything the witnesses said had been true. He also shared that he had (*prior to my call*) requested a person to call me. He is currently serving a thirty-year prison sentence, but he sought God 's forgiveness for not having listened to the Word presented by the witnesses. Regrettably, the Word of God (*given by the witnesses*) was neither accepted by the original church, nor by the second church. Can we say that if the original church had carried out church discipline that the marriage could have been preserved along with many other lives? Obviously, we do not have that answer, but the fact that he later sought God 's forgiveness reveals there was potential for restoration.
8. It is important to know that as bad as it may look, God is sovereign and answers prayer. There was a husband who called and asked for prayer since his wife had just left him. We prayed that the Lord would bring someone to minister to his wife. Within three hours of that prayer, his wife literally walked into the side of my car as I was parking in a city over sixty miles from his home. Several hours later she accepted the Lord, and that same evening she drove for several hours to reconcile with her husband. Yes, their marriage is viable to this day and the story is written in a book he wrote about his movement from rock star to walking in God's grace.

These are only a few of the many testimonies of God's sovereignty in restoring relationships. We have focused on marriages since marriage is an integral part of God's work in His church. You can see that the testimonies of people God has restored become a powerful component of God 's ministry of reconciliation. The vulnerability and brokenness required to minister God 's Word are a hallmark of the ministry of reconciliation. Many more testimonies are recounted in the soon to be released book. The following ***Executive Summary*** will allow you to quickly examine many of the key scriptures utilized in God's process for restoring relationships.

Executive Summary

- God is returning for His Bride, the Church
 - A mystery: **Ephesians 5:22**
 - Parables: **Matthew 25ff.**
 - John the Baptist's explanation of his role, **John 3:29**
 - Jesus explanation why his disciples did not fast, **Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19, 20; Luke 5:34**
- His bride is to be without spot wrinkle or blemish, **Ephesians 5:27**
- There are to be no divisions within the church, **I Corinthians 1:10**
- Giving account to God for those He gave you, **Hebrews 13:17**
- Ministry of reconciliation meets these responsibilities, **2 Corinthians 5:18, 19**
- God established three distinct steps for restoring relationships, **Matthew 18:15-20**
 - Are you teaching that if there is a division between two people?
 - One must go first to the other person in private, **Matthew 18:15**
 - Trespasser seeks forgiveness, (comes before worship), **Matthew 5: 23, 24;**
 - If offended, bring rebuke, and if repentance forgive, **Luke 17:3, 4**
- (*The book soon to be released prepares believers to carry out this private confrontation*)
 - If reconciliation fails in private meeting (after prayer)
 - Witnesses are called (*not ones with knowledge of event*), **Matthew 18:16**
 - They establish the Word of God (*Rhema*) to bring reconciliation
 - Reconsider your idea of witness, **Galatians 6:1**
 - Note: Having mature believers as witnesses is crucial
 - God's Word is sufficient to restore relationships, **2 Timothy 3:16, 17**
 - Church leadership, when needed , confirms God's established Word, **Matthew 18:17**
 - If God's Word established by the witnesses is rejected:
 - The Word of God established by witnesses is presented to leadership
 - Leadership either confirms or rejects the Word of God presented
 - If one or both parties reject God 's re-presented Word by church leadership
 - Removal from fellowship is to be carried out, **Titus 3:10**
 - Note: heresy only arises by knowingly rejecting God's Word
 - This removal is never intended as a punishment (**restoration**)
 - Protects the rest of the church from sin, **Galatians 5:9**
 - Local church exercising: *Keys To The Kingdom*, **Matthew 16:19, Matthew 18:18**
 - Primary goal must be to restore the person removed, **Luke 15:4-7**

The foregoing summary provides you with an overview of the ministry. The most critical passage that we will examine in great detail will be **Matthew 18:16:**

But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. KJV (Underlining added)

Please compare this KJV verse with the translation you use for preaching (it differs significantly from most modern translations). An extensive exegesis of this passage will be presented. These significant differences in this verse and several others prompted our use of the KJV to best present the ministry. The role of witness in this verse differs from our commonly accepted view of a person who viewed or had knowledge of an event. Unlike the judgments Moses was called to render, the witnesses are called to establish God's Word. They are not to bring testimony. They are to establish God's Word. God has granted to the local church the power and authority to assure that God's Word is properly established to foster reconciliation and bring unity.

You may find it useful to review my credentials in the ministry of reconciliation: As a young Christian, I served as staff counsel for the Christian Legal Society with responsibility for the first *Tell It To The Church Conference* held in the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, May 20-23, 1982. After the conference and moving back to Northern Michigan, we formed *Northern Michigan Christian Conciliation Service, Inc. (NMCCS)*, and I have served as the Executive Director since its inception. When I married my wife in 1983 *(to my knowledge)* we were the first couple in Michigan to have our marriage covenant recorded along with our marriage license, *(it required the ministry of reconciliation to be exhausted before court jurisdiction could be invoked)*. We have never taken any compensation from the ministry; it is a faith ministry.

As a pastor you are daily are confronted with an apparent epidemic of divisions in the church. This ministry will change your counseling responsibility when addressing divisions. It is my hope and prayer that after you read this letter you will intentionally exhort those God has given you to carry out the ministry of reconciliation and restore broken relationships *(having heard this Clarion Call)*. We hope you will also accept the Church's responsibility for this essential end times ministry to prepare "His Bride" *(the church)* for His return. If I have failed to properly divide God's Word, please rebuke me *(in private under Matthew 18:15)*. We welcome your insights.

Recently some popular novels presented a warped theology and many pastors were peppered with questions by their congregations. These questions might have led you to read the books in order to answer questions from your flock about the theology being presented.

There also are numerous non-fiction fads that have blown through the church. Regrettably , after each wave of excitement and early commitment the fad wears off and we have seen little growth within the church and regrettably even less impact on our communities. We want you to be aware of this ministry before it is presented in book form. If you reject this ministry, you can advise your people *(in advance)* not to read the book.

Everyone desires to see the sovereign work of God. Sadly, some churches anxious to see God reveal Himself hoped an applied formula experienced by another church would produce His sovereign work in their church. We have a tendency to forget that communication with God is not a formula that when followed requires God to meet our requests. God desires His people to repent from their sins, and to forgive one another. The broken hearted petitioning the Lord with a repentant heart will produce a radiant bride, His church.

The ministry of reconciliation is directed towards calling believers to know Jesus and become uniquely honorable. The Psalmist recognizes our true condition; we are created by God, **Psalm 139: 13, 14**. We each are given different gifts and talents and God works uniquely in each person's life. The secret is to be open for the Lord to accomplish His purposes in and through you, **Isaiah 64:8**:

But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

The ministry of reconciliation has witnessed wonderful stories of restoration. The forthcoming book shares many of these testimonies for encouragement. It is important to realize that no matter how dramatic a restoration no one should ever base ministry on anything other than the sufficiency, power and authority of God's Word as it is walked out in the lives of individual

believers. Will the local church bear accountability for its preparation of His bride? If Jesus' work on the cross (*by itself*) accomplished the bride's preparation, then why did God give us the scriptures we will be examining. This does not diminish Jesus' wholly sufficient sacrifice on the cross for the individual believer. The ministry of reconciliation helps restore the unity necessary for the Bride of Christ to be without blemish. The very thought of a church without blemish appears almost impossible looking at the church today, but with God all things are possible.

We are instructed when correcting a believer it is never an option to merely reject him or her, but we are to provide an opportunity for reconciliation, **2 Thessalonians 3:14-15**:

And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

The ministry of reconciliation is a necessity for a church marked by broken relationships. Sadly, some of these divisions exist because the church has been unwilling to assume its responsibility. The ministry of reconciliation helps the church to admonish or bring correction in love through God's process of restoration, **Matthew 18:15-20**:

- In **Acts 20:31** Dr. Luke indicates for three years he had warned those walking contrary to God with tears.
- Paul acknowledges that the brethren in Rome were able admonish one another, **Romans 15:14**.
- Paul reiterates this to the Colossians, **Colossians 1:28** revealing that it is this very process that allows for presenting every man perfect in Christ, as is confirmed in **1 Thessalonians 5:12-14**:

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; ¹³ And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴ Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

These scriptures recognize the importance of leadership's responsibility to bring correction (*admonition*). This responsibility of the church to bring correction should be embraced by those in committed relationship within the church. However, if leadership fails to assume this responsibility, then how is it possible for those in the church to esteem them highly? Peacefulness within a congregation reveals that leadership is meeting their responsibility.

Scripture reveals that reconciliation requires patience, discernment and spiritual maturity. We have found (*depending on what is happening within a person*), the same observed actions can lead to significantly different responses:

- If a person is intentionally rejecting God's Word you need to bring a warning,
- If a person is faint hearted or having only a little of the Holy Spirit then our response would be to bring encouragement.
- If a person is sick (*that can be physical, spiritual or moral illness*) then witnesses may need to stand with the person bringing support.

These are not intellectual decisions, but require God's wisdom and being led by the Holy Spirit. The blessings that flow from reconciliation will impact not only your congregation, but will overflow into your community. Imagine the community observing impossible marriages restored, churches that have been divided reunited, and the testimony of those involved is that

these miracles occurred only because they have applied God's Word.

How to begin? The first and primary component of the ministry of reconciliation is to privately approach the other person. This is God's first step in the ministry of reconciliation. Shortly after starting the ministry, we began using an orientation session that allowed those facing division to learn how they were to resolve their disputes in private under **Matthew 18:15**. This step (*while not mandated by scripture*) significantly increased the number of relationships being restored.

This letter is not intended to teach how a person prepares for and carries out going to the other person in private. This first step is fully presented in the forthcoming book. The focus of this letter is on the responsibility of the church when private reconciliation fails. It is our hope that the forthcoming book will either replace or significantly decrease the time previously devoted to the orientation session.

If private confrontation fails, God instructs believers to utilize other believers to help bring restoration. The local church is mandated to be part of the restoration process if private confrontation fails. This letter is posted on the web to prepare pastors to respond to any inquiries about the ministry of reconciliation. Sadly, strife and division within churches and families is the norm rather than the exception.

Absent this letter to the churches the book could bring confusion to believers and actually foster division instead of unity in churches where the ministry of reconciliation is absent. As pastor, you must evaluate whether this ministry should be implemented in your church. This will not be a lightly made decision. Implementing the ministry will most likely require major changes. We believe should you choose to implement the ministry God will bless your decision.

My initial letter prompting you look to this website raised questions about Islam and its inroads into many former Christian nations. You should properly ask:

How does this relate to the ministry of reconciliation?

Let me relate a story. I was at a campground in Florida and walked into the camp store and saw my wife toe to toe with a young man, and heard her say:

Don't talk to me about America's sin, when your Mullahs deflower young girls in the name of your God. That is pedophilia!

My immediate intervention was required. After deescalating the confrontation, I explained to the young man that I had read and studied the Koran (*including the Cow and taught from it*), and that there was a very real problem since Gabriel either suffered from schizophrenia or either the Bible or the Koran was in error, because Gabriel is found saying two different things in each text. He interrupted me and said:

You Christians have no idea what you believe you have all these different Bibles all saying different things; you put all your Bibles on a table and shook it and follow what was left.

He indicated that the Koran was without error and if anyone changed even one syllable that they would kill him. This was after he had previously denied being a jihadist. I intentionally did not point out that Islamists were killing each other over those non-existent changes. My response was a question as to whether he had read the Bible's received text (*Textus Receptus*) that had been passed down without error for over a half a millennium before his prophet was born. I left him with a challenge to have a further discussion after he had read our received text. I did not hear

back from him. My reason for presenting the foregoing story is:

- We have been given the true Word of God and the Muslims have what they believe to be God's Word.
- Muslims actually act on what we see as their false belief system.
- Most Christians (*by and large*) fail to live in accordance with what we proclaim to be the true Word of God.

We hope this letter will help you understand why God's Word is an ecclesiastical matter and why the courts cannot be involved, but also how this significantly differs from Sharia law.

In response to the young man's statement about Christians not knowing what we believe, I referred to the *Textus Receptus* (*regrettably very few translations today rely on the Textus Receptus*). He was correct there are some significant differences. Following is my rationale for using KJV:

- It is one of several word for word translations
- It uses the received text (*Textus Receptus*) that throughout most of church history was the text most universally accepted (*until recently - 150 years*).
- KJV does not utilize the new (*older*) Greek and Hebrew texts that were initially introduced by Hort and Wescott.
- It does not translate concepts as is done by many of the newer translations.
 - In the vast majority of texts *concept* translation proves to be viable and useful.
- As mentioned at the start of the letter KJV provides the clearest exposition the Greek and Hebrew for many of the reconciliation ministry texts we will examine in detail.
- Finally, I am confident that every pastor when comparing the KJV translation to the translation you utilize in presenting God's Word to your congregation will easily overcome any archaic language present.

It is my position that in a limited number of texts; errors have been introduced that may partially explain why the ministry of reconciliation is virtually absent in most churches. Further, if God's Word is true and without error, then no variance of God's Word as originally transmitted should be accepted by any bible believing church.

In 1880 Pastor Edward Sell wrote a book *The Faith of Islam*. He lived in India for 15 years to better understand Islam in order to properly minister the gospel to Muslims. While it is one of the most understandable books on Islam (*highly recommended*), he was in error about the viability of Islam. He felt that it would cease to be a major religion in a short period of time since it was unable and unwilling to change by accommodating itself to a changing society. He felt that Christianity would triumph because we were willing to adapt our faith to meet society. Sadly this adaptation often appears to present the different gospels observed by the young Muslim.

Let me share a recent example of a portion of an email posted to Ken Hamm, *Answers in Genesis* that may place this issue in context. The email is addressing the debate between Ken Hamm and Bill Nye held on February 4, 2014.

I think the most basic point that we are in disagreement is on the inerrancy of scripture. I love your passion, and I am sure it will be helpful for me to have further discussion with you on this subject. At this point in time, I very much see scripture as infallible, though not inerrant. Personally I don't see the need to treat the bible as if it is completely void of error in areas of science, history, grammar, etc ...

The debate (*most likely*) did not bring change to those who reject God's Word for it is only

foolishness to them, **1 Corinthians 1:18-25**. Sadly, as illustrated by the author of the e-mail many (*considering themselves to be Christians*) believe that the adaption to society requires rejection of the inerrancy of God's Word.

Today (*as at the time of Paul*) a Gnostic (*science*) influence is equally or even more strongly present in today's society. God's Word has already addressed this issue, **1 Timothy 6:20**:

Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called:

In America and most of Europe, most scholars conclude that we are now in a post Christian era. Many European countries are trending towards becoming Muslim countries. The great cathedrals are empty and many are being sold and converted into mosques. With the upsurge of Islam in the United States there are increasing demands for Sharia law to take precedence over our judicial system.

An encounter with another young Muslim man (*who came from Ann Arbor, Michigan*) occurred outside the UN in Switzerland. He had been protesting for four months the slaughter of over 20,000 of his sect in Iraq. He originally came from Iran. He made an interesting comment as we were discussing Christianity and Islam. He posited that the problem was not Islam, but Sharia law making the statement: *If any of the women in my sect wanted to wear a burka that was their decision, but if they did not it was not any type of an issue.* He was saying that his sect rejected the literal teaching of Islam as to compulsory Sharia law such as dress. Contrast this with a majority of the Muslim countries where it is a crime to present the gospel, or even possess a Bible. In many countries it is a capital offence for a Muslim to convert to Christianity. (*Example: Meriam Yehya Ibrahim Ishag*)

As Christians we are instructed to obey the laws of the state, **Romans 13:1**; **Titus 3:1**. However, if man's law conflicts with God's Word, we are to follow God's Word, **Daniel, Chapter 3**; **Luke 20:25**. However, what most Christians are missing is that God's Word (*which is not specifically based upon culture*) ought to be adhered to by believing Christians. For instance God's Word proclaims a literal six days of creation with God resting on the seventh. The sanctity of God's Word cannot be over emphasized.

Entire denominations have adapted to a Godless society. To become politically correct they have chosen to reject clear unambiguous scriptural mandates. Compromising the inerrancy of God's Word to fit society started a downward spiral we are now observing in Europe but the United States is not that far behind. The results coming from compromising God's Word have not been salutatory for Christianity. This does not mean that we should live in the past, but we must be willing to accept God's Word as true and reject those who would change God's Word.

Does God approve homosexuality as a Godly lifestyle? Does the Bible provide for practicing homosexuals (*without repentance*) to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven any more than the glutton, liar, adulterer etc.? It took Phil Robertson, (*Duck Dynasty*) to stand where the church should have been standing, **Ephesians 6:13**. We are clearly involved in a spiritual battle. The only offensive weapon Christians have been given is God's Word. God's grace and mercy are sufficient, but His Word cannot be changed to meet the politically correct needs of a society where good is too often called evil and evil is now called good thereby earning God's displeasure and judgment, **Isaiah 5:20**:

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Christians are called to love every sinner for we are all sinners saved by grace, but you cannot Biblically support a position that we should sin more that God's grace will abound more,

Romans 6:1, 2:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? ² God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

Abortion is a sin! In no way am I saying that the abortionist, the murderer, the homosexual, the liar, the adulterer etc. are consigned to hell. Rather what I am saying is God's Word is clear there are certain behaviors that God calls sin, and no approval of sin by society or the church will replace repentance and seeking forgiveness from God. Can a person who has had an abortion be forgiven? **Absolutely!** Seeking God's forgiveness, and forgiving those who offend us or sin against God is an essential part of the ministry of reconciliation, **Colossians 3:13:**

Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ for gave you, so also do ye.

After being saved by accepting Jesus as our personal, savior can we continue to promote abortion and expect to enter in at the strait gate, **Matthew 7:13, 14?**

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in there at: ¹⁴ Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Abortion within the church is a very divisive issue. One of the reasons for these divisions is that the church has been unwilling to proclaim the inerrancy of God's Word and God's requirement for the believer's adherence to it. The application of God's Word in restoring relationships is the essence of the ministry of reconciliation. Consider what impact a knowing rejection of God's Word may have on an individual believer, **Hebrews 6:4-6.**

There exists a very real tension with which every pastor must struggle between reaching the unsaved, and still applying the ministry of reconciliation. The ministry of reconciliation can only apply to those in committed relationship in a church.

You may properly ask: *Whether I apply or don't apply the ministry of reconciliation will it affect my responsibility for my congregation?* You may wish to ponder: If you have allowed those who consider themselves to be Christians to believe that they can continue to live an ungodly life style there may come a time when their teeth will gnash, **Luke 13:28:**

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.

If you have failed to proclaim the full gospel or taught those whose teeth may gnash that they may continue in their sin, how will that affect the account you will give to God, **Hebrews 13:17:**

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

How will you give an account explaining why they refused to heed the admonition of God's Word if it was never given? There may also be consequences flowing to yourself as an under

shepherd if you continue to ignore the responsibility that God has given you. My hope from this letter is that you will start to grasp the authority God has granted to the local church.

If the church does not have a mandate to prevent heresy, why is the church instructed when a person who rejects God's Word, after the second admonition (*that would be affirmation of God's Word presented by the witnesses and affirmed by the church, Matthew 18:17*) to apply discipline, **Titus 3:10**:

A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;

The foregoing passage confirms that the first admonition comes when the witnesses establish God's Word, **Matthew 18:16**. If God's Word is rejected, the church is called to confirm the Word of God established by the Witnesses that is the second admonition, **Matthew 18:17**:

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

The ministry of reconciliation calls believers to repentance. A believer that intentionally rejects God's Word (*after it has been confirmed by the church*), must be removed by the church for rejecting God's Word as a heretic. The only reason for removing a person is on the grounds of heresy. Is it possible to become a heretic by having a different view of facts relating to a dispute? From our perspective it is self-evident that only the rejection of God's Word given by the witnesses and confirmed by the church results in a person becoming a heretic. This also provides confirmation that the witnesses are called to confirm God's Word.

Regrettably there may be those either because of a desire not to be seen as "*legalistic*" or not wanting to accept the magnitude of the authority placed in their hands who will continue to reject the ministry of reconciliation. My only responsibility is to present God's Word which I am doing through this teaching and the forthcoming book.

A person rejecting God's Word (*despite proclaiming a relationship*) may never have come to the saving grace of God in the first place, or is exhibiting an unrepentant or hardened heart. This insight reveals the importance of why the person being disciplined have both the knowledge and an understanding of God's Word. Removal is very serious and we feel that his or her rejection of God's Word should be intentional. This is why God has placed this awesome responsibility solely within the local church.

God's Word is the underlying basis for the ministry of reconciliation. Paul reveals the extent of authority given when we accept scripture as being God's inerrant Word, **2 Timothy 3:16-17**:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷ That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

God's Word is not only the doctrine upon which our faith rests, but has been given for us to bring admonition and correction. This is an essential truth that we believe must be affirmed by any person claiming to be a believer in Jesus Christ.

If one rejects the premise of the inerrancy of God's Word, then what portions of God's Word does one choose to accept? Scripture either comes directly from God speaking to those he has inspired to present His Word, or these are only man's musings about what might be. Our attempt to adapt God's Word to a Godless society is not working very well.

Another issue raised in my initial letter questioned the recent movement of youth towards the

occult. This may be partially explained because many young people see the occult offers powers. Why are they not seeing the much greater power available to believers in Jesus Christ?

- It may be that they do not see the church actually applying God's Word.
- It may be the church has rejected the very power it has been given.

This power is the application by the church of God's inspired and inerrant Word. (This underlies the question raised in the e-mail to Ken Hamm, (Page 8).

I recall a recent discussion with a person who had signed articles of faith acknowledging God's Word as truth when joining a local ministerial. In a meeting he came out and said: *Surely you cannot believe those stories!* Every pastor around the table affirmed they believed those stories to be true. Repeating for emphasis, the inerrancy of God's Word is the foundation for the ministry of reconciliation.

The ministry of reconciliation (*based on God's unchanging Word*) brings transformation. God's Word confronts sin, offers repentance, and when accepted brings reconciliation. We appropriate His truth by acknowledging that God's inerrant Word works in men's hearts to bring restoration.

Pope Francis addressed the power and authority of God's Word on January 16, 2014 at the chapel of St. Martha in the context of the ongoing abuse scandals plaguing the Catholic Church. He did not (*in this homily*) relate the power of God's Word to the ministry of reconciliation. We believe when the ministry of reconciliation is applied it will produce that radiant bride providing the hope of restoration. The Pope in his homily related the scandals to the time when Israel lost the Ark of the Covenant by taking it into battle as a talisman (something magical). He asked:

Where was the Word of God in those scandals; where was the Word of God in those men and in those women? They did not have a relationship with God! They had a position in the Church, a position of power, even of comfort. But the Word of God, no! 'But I wear a medal', 'I carry the Cross' ... Yes just as those bore the Ark! Without the living relationship with God and the Word of God!

Does the fault lie solely in those men and women who have clearly failed to follow God's Word? Our ministry has been involved in a number of cases similar to the scandals being addressed by Pope Francis. I am personally unable to proclaim that God's Word was absent in every case. Remember the example we gave about the man serving time in prison. Had the church immediately acted would it have brought repentance? Again, we do not know!

In a number of the cases (*including pastors*) I am unable to say the Word of God was not in some of these men and women. While they clearly were in sin, after admitting their sin and serving time in prison we have seen repentance and restored walks. Admittedly this raises some very difficult but necessary questions. Among the questions we need to examine are:

- Have they been offended¹ (**Mark 14:29** and **16** other verses KJV-NIV numerous as fall away)
- Have they fallen away² (**Hebrews 6:6** (*presents a more dangerous and perplexing position*))
- Or were they never transformed (*having come to a personal relationship with Jesus*)?

Sadly, in some newer translations, the distinction between these two very distinct definitions is often lost in translation. It is clear that all of us (*at some time*) will be tripped up as revealed by the

¹ skandalizō (*skan-dal-id'-zo*) To "scandalize"; to *entrap*, that is, *trip up* (*figuratively stumble [transitively] or entice to sin, apostasy or displeasure*): - (make to) offend.

² parapiptō (*par-ap-ip'-to*) From to *fall aside*, that is, (*figuratively*) to *apostatize*: - fall away.

first definition. Peter was tripped up when he denied Jesus on three occasions. Yet, the second definition raises some very serious questions about restoration. Some newer translations use the same English terminology interchangeably for both definitions thus bringing confusion. Thirdly, are those who mistakenly believe they know Jesus, but do not have the Holy Spirit abiding within them. These latter stand in a better position for restoration during the ministry of reconciliation than those who have fallen away (*second definition*). When presenting God's Word during ministry discerning these differences where people stand before God is crucial in carrying out the ministry of reconciliation. Restoring a person standing in a **Hebrews 6:6** position is more problematic.

When God 's Bride, *the church*, incorporates the ministry of reconciliation, **Matthew 18:15-20** by empowering witnesses to establish God's Word, and is willing to accept its responsibility to remove those who heretically continue to reject God's Word, then it could bring the transformation of the heart discussed by Pope Francis.

There is only one Word of God not many variants where we may pick and choose the one with which we are most comfortable. It is essential to treat God's Word with reverence and respect. As previously mentioned, it troubles me to see many newer translations constantly changing God's Word. Do we create a gender neutral Bible? How many changes do we accept in God's Word to make it acceptable to an unbelieving world?

I am personally unable to accept changes to the received text that are not carefully documented. Too many changes appear to be accepted without thorough analysis of an alleged existing older MSS. From my perspective any changes to the received text should present solid justification including a full textual analysis prior to being accepted. Sadly, this critical analysis appears lacking before many translators change God's Word. My approach may appear to be radical, but I do like the definition of radical which means back to the roots. If these questions about translations are troubling to you, (*in the future after the book is published*) I will post a full rationale behind my determinations that you will be able to download should you have an interest.

My initial letter asked whether you are experiencing broken relationships within your church. If your answer was yes, we hope you can begin to appreciate that the ministry of reconciliation is God's answer. I am asking you (*as Pastor*) to re-evaluate your ministry. How you are presenting God's Word? Perhaps, the more important question may be how is your flock (*those to whom you are ministering*) accepting and applying God's Word in their daily lives? Is it bringing life and transformation? Is God's Word being applied to healing relationships within your church? Does your church apply **Matthew 18: 15-20** to restore broken relationships? These difficult questions are being asked with full understanding about both the nature of the request and the challenge being presented to each of you.

I am not asking you to merely accept my conclusions, but like the Bereans please study to see if what I am presenting is correct, **Acts 17:10-11**:

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

One of the dangers that each of us face is to blindly accept what we believe about our theology

without being more noble and closely examining God's Word to see if our theology does indeed fit with God's Word. This is particularly true when it comes to restoring relationships.

There are many reasons that can be attributed to the increasing divisions within the church and the increasing tensions leading to: church divisions, lack of unity and destroyed marriages. We could attribute these to the effects of a post Christian society, the increase in the feminist movement, the economy, etc., but perhaps underlying all of these and those not mentioned is the church's willingness to adapt God's Word making it acceptable and palatable to a post Christian society combined with an unwillingness to exercise the church's authority.

We have already considered several examples, another is the increasing emphasis on a psychological counseling model for healing marriages. Relying on the science of psychology to explain broken relationships appears to be a professional approach. Isn't it exactly what the world is doing? Should not the church be first approaching such divisions in the manner God has directed? There are a small percentage of marriages where one or both parties are in need of psychiatric or psychological treatment before applying God's Word to restore their marriages. Yet, what about the marriage vows about *till death us do part*? Is not mental illness a sickness that should be an accepted part of that vow. If God says in His Word that establishing His Word will restore unity, shouldn't turning to God's Word be our first approach?

God has established a process to bring reconciliation. If it becomes apparent that there are psychiatric, drug or any other issues that would keep believers from being able to hear and apply God's Word in their lives, then and only then, should we utilize professional modalities. Why would the church intentionally reject God's clear instruction:

- Fear that God's Word would not be sufficient?
- Fear of being sued because God's Word offended someone?
- Simply being too busy?
- Expediency of letting a trained person handle it scientifically?

God clearly states that we are to have NO divisions between us, **I Corinthians 1:10**:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Why do divisions abound? The church's failure to utilize the ministry of reconciliation is certainly one reason! The eternal consequences revealed through Paul's analogy between Jesus' work on the cross as the perfect sacrifice, and the sacrificial responsibility of the husband to his wife should be sufficient to overcome any objections about fear or time constraints. Should not a radiant bride be our first priority. Jesus is returning for a church without spot, wrinkle or blemish, **Ephesians 5:25-27**:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; ²⁶ That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word (rhema). ²⁷ That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. (Parenthesis Added)

An often overlooked essential truth is that every husband is the spiritual head in his home, **Ephesians 5:23**, and will have to give account for his family. Does your ministry intentionally recognize the husband as the spiritual head in his home? Applying this one Biblical truth may

greatly empower your ministry. Many husbands feel that they cannot be the spiritual head in their home. Our response is simple:

In God's eyes you are the spiritual head, and your feeling does not change, or remove your responsibility to God for your family.

I recall one young man who reiterated that the divisions destroying his marriage were not his fault. We repeated again and again it was not about fault but responsibility. It was our longest dispute resolution lasting over a year. We were invited to their 50th wedding anniversary over a quarter of a century after the ministry was completed.

It is the cleansing work of God's spoken Word (*rhema*) that brings about the reconciled, restored and cleansed bride in her full radiance before God almighty. Examine your own church. Does it meet God's criteria seen in the verse 26? If not: *the something* either totally missing or not fully implemented may be God's ministry of reconciliation, **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**:

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Now then we are ambassadors/or Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

What is commonly called *church discipline* is an integral part of the ministry of reconciliation. We find that the concept of church discipline (*that could result in excommunication*) is seldom present within the local church today. Even when utilized, it often becomes something different from what God intended. The term church discipline is actually a misnomer. You will learn God never sees this ministry as punishment, but rather as a call to restoration.

At the onset, please ask yourself: "Why isn't my local community more noticeably impacted by our ecclesia (*church*)?" The answer (*as alluded to above*) is that you may be missing, *the something*, that God called the church to do. My research (*reviewing the original founding documents of the Catholic [incl. Orthodox] church and all of the major Protestant denominations*) reveals that church discipline was an essential element in every early doctrinal statement. However, even when these doctrines were developed it is clear that the model practiced often failed to comport with God's purpose of restoration.

Please take the time and research the roots of your own denominational beliefs rather than rely on my representation. This does not mean (*as mentioned above*) that the process (*in your denomination*) was carried out correctly. Historically we can see that the inquisition clearly lacked essential elements of the ministry of reconciliation. Likewise, protestant church discipline when utilized also routinely fails in its most essential purpose, restoration.

This may explain why church discipline (*as practiced*) has been properly rejected. You cannot find any New Testament Biblical justification to torture or kill a person in the name of reconciliation. What has been denominated as church discipline is an essential (*but hopefully seldom needed*) part of restoring relationships. My hope is to help you see what this ministry should look like, and how it differs completely from what the church thought they were rejecting. Most church discipline done over the centuries falls far short. This is man's failure not God's.

As previously mentioned, it is essential to understand that church discipline is actually a misnomer since it is never about punishment, but always about offering restoration. The only

real authority given to the church happens to be this very authority that most churches have rejected. This power is to actually retain or remit sins, **Keys of the Kingdom, Matthew 16:19**.

Many ministers of the Gospel and many churches have rejected the very Keys God has provided. Retaining and remitting sins is not to be undertaken lightly. It also requires each of us to carry out introspection and judging ourselves before judging another, **Matthew 7:1-5**:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. ² For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. ³ And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? ⁴ Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? ⁵ Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

These passages have been used as a rationale for rejecting the ministry of reconciliation. This scripture does not remove correction (*admonition*) which is a type of judgment. It is an essential scripture explaining God's requirement of introspection before bringing admonition to a brother or sister, clarifying the humbleness required by those called to bring correction, **Galatians 6:1**:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

Does God proclaim that our introspection is crucial in today's society? Immediately before God proclaims the inerrancy of his Word, He paints a portrait of a society that starkly resembles today's society, and warns this condition appears closer to the Lord's return, **2 Timothy 3:1-5**:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. ² For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, ⁴ Traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. ⁵ Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof from such turn away.

As we look around today we are seeing perilous times. We also see an increasing preoccupation with our own interests and desires that often permeate the church and our own walk of faith. We are certainly experiencing rebellion of children against their parents. God admonishes us to have nothing to do with those that have a form of Godliness but who reject His power and authority. We believe the admonition to turn away can only be properly carried out by applying the ministry of reconciliation and establishing God's Word including (*when necessary*) the discipline component, **Matthew 18:15-20**.

God has made it very clear that the ministry of reconciliation can only be carried out by and through the local church. God gave awesome authority to exercise called the **keys of the kingdom of Heaven, Matthew 16:19**:

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Within Catholic tradition **The Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven** have been interpreted as empowering Peter and his line of successor Popes. Is it only a coincidence that the exact language including the power bestowed is clearly given not to just to Peter, but to the local church for carrying out its ministry of reconciliation? We find that the application of these keys within the church are specifically given to allow the local church to meet its responsibility for church discipline given in **Matthew 18:17** as shown in **Matthew 18:18**:

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever

ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

To limit this power and authority only to an apostolic succession of Popes appears to greatly limit the authority placed in each minister of the gospel, and fails to adequately explain why God uses the exact same language in the fully integrated ministry of reconciliation.

Matthew 18: 18-20 is a part of the **Matthew 18: 15-17 process**. When Jesus finished instructing how to carryout reconciliation; it is Peter (*to whom Jesus previously entrusted these Keys*) who immediately asks how often he should forgive and Jesus replies, **Matthew 18:21, 22:**

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? ²² Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Peter understood that this authority rested in the local church and that forgiveness was an essential element in the ministry of reconciliation. He only failed to grasp the extent of forgiveness required which is why Jesus gave the parable about the unrighteous servant to help Peter grasp the importance of forgiveness. God made certain we cannot dismiss this parable as being about a master who improperly took back forgiveness. The last verse in Chapter 18 presents the importance Jesus places on forgiveness, **Matthew 18:35:**

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

This awesome power and responsibility is given to the local church to exercise the last of the three steps in the process that God established for restoring relationships. It is the church's authority to bind and loose. This binding and loosing (*from our perspective*) is not about establishing facts in a dispute. The only thing that has already been established in heaven is God's Word. God's Word is without error, and when established by the witnesses between brethren it governs, and only if His Word is rejected by one or both of them and then confirmed by the church is leadership authorized to carryout excommunication.

We know that God's Word alone has the power and authority to discern the thoughts and intent of the heart and bring reconciliation, **Hebrews 4:12:**

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

This passage reveals that it is through God's Word that we are able to decide whether a person's action requires rebuke, comfort or support.

Regrettably, the few churches practicing church discipline fail to understand removing a person from fellowship is not the end of the story, but only the beginning of leadership's responsibility as recounted in the parable of the lost sheep, **Luke 15:3-7:**

And he spake this parable unto them, saying, ⁴ What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? ⁵ And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. ⁷ I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

All of Chapter 15 focuses on the importance of restoration and emphasizes the importance God places on recovering a single soul going in the wrong direction. Almost without exception believers (*when they understand the ministry*) desire accountability and want to walk in accordance

with God's Word. To become the radiant bride the church must become more intentional by helping those in the church understand that there is a difference both in responsibility of the church and accountability of those in the church between attendees and those in committed relationship.

It is clear that the first time attendee may have a life style that could not and should not be acceptable for a person in committed fellowship. The church is called to reach the unsaved, but the challenge is to assure that the unsaved do not cause the church to reject God's Word thereby making the church comfortable so the sinner can continue in his or her sin and believe their attendance in an accepting church assures redemption leading to the potential gnashing of teeth.

We are discussing the process of sanctification. Recently several Pastors in a meeting discussed that there is no formula that can be applied to determine when it is appropriate to call a brother or sister to a Godliness. We do know that God's standards about sin are not moveable. We must be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to bring conviction if the person is saved, but I do not believe that it relieves leadership from addressing notorious sin within the church.

We already reviewed the importance of discerning the difference between rebellion, a weak spirit, and sickness. This discernment will greatly impact both leadership's timing, and how they may present any admonition. There are a number of very troubling passages impacting those standing in sin. One of the most troubling is, **Matthew 7:21-23**:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never³ knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

It is instructive to examine the simple Greek term *never* since it removes the troubling thought about a capricious God who arbitrarily rejects a person. It makes clear that despite the person's thoughts about a having a relationship with God, it never existed. It also should cause those caught up in a controlling sin to carefully examine whether they have indeed accepted Jesus and allowed the Holy Spirit to dwell within. Once a believer accepts Jesus and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within continuing in sin as usual is not an option. This does not mean that each of us will not slip or stumble into sin. **That is a given!**

A pastor recently questioned whether pastors standing for the importance of God's Word might become an affront to unbelievers. The person properly observed that the world often sees Christians as self-righteous. This observation is correct. The truth is that the gospel will always be an offense to those that do not believe, **Luke 12:51-53**:

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: ⁵² For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. ⁵³ The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

³ oudepote (oo-dep'-ot-eh) not even at any time, that is, never at all: - neither at any time, never, nothing at any time.

However, we should never be offensive in presenting God's Word. That is the beauty of the ministry of reconciliation that a humble witness brings forth truth in love. This does not remove God's mandate that we are to stand for God's Word even in a post Christian era knowing that God's Word is an offence to most. Many unbelievers will be offended, but that offense should never come from how we present God's Word, but from God's Word itself.

Over the years we have gained insights from those embroiled in conflict asking seemingly inconsequential questions, and from pastors and elders who have shared with us over the years. Regrettably, we are unable to refer you to experts from whom we have derived this information. Over the years, a number of theologians have rejected our interpretation forcing us to provide a thorough and careful analysis of God's Word for you to consider. This letter will also be sent to theological seminaries for their evaluation. We want God's truth to prevail and are not presumptuous to think that we could not have missed something which is why we encourage your response and if appropriate your rebuke.

In this post Christian era we should expect that Christians who endeavor to pursue a Godly lifestyle will be persecuted by a Godless society, **2 Timothy 3:13-15**:

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. ¹³ But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. ¹⁴ But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; ¹⁵ And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

It is not coincidental that God provides us with this insight about persecution just before affirming the power and authority of His Word.

We recommend in the reconciliation process that believers formally request the church to exercise church discipline should they reject God's Word. We continually reiterate the entire ministry is founded on the premise that God's Word is without error. We can say with a high degree of certitude that believers want to know if they are walking contrary to God. This is the part of the church's responsibility that has too often been overlooked. If you have not already grasped, you will come to see that establishing God's Word between brethren is the answer for restoring relationships. This is a very large departure from what is commonly accepted.

Shortly we will fully dissect a crucial verse in the ministry of reconciliation, **Matthew 18:16**. Did God intend *matters* to be established by the witnesses or did He intend that His *Word* be established by the witnesses and when necessary confirmed by the local church? We have seen that it is God's spoken Word (*Rhema*) that cleanses His Bride. If you are able to accept that scripture presents a broader perspective than that the Keys were only being given to Peter for him to establish an apostolic line of succession, then you will need to struggle with how your church's ministry of reconciliation fits into God's plan for a radiant bride.

The forthcoming book trains the believer to practically apply the mandate of **Matthew 18:15**:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass⁴ against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

⁴ hamartanō ham-ar-tan'-o properly to miss the mark (and so not share in the prize), that is, (figuratively) to err, especially (morally) to sin: - for your faults, offend, sin, trespass.

A question arises when comparing various translations of this verse. Is it only a sin that is to be rebuked or does the mandate apply even when you are either affected by a simple slip caused by another person falling a little short of God's Word or you may have fallen short yourself and need forgiveness from the other person? The Greek term for *trespass* (*harmartano*) (*Footnote 4*) includes missing the mark or falling a little short thus clearly including more than notorious sin. The forthcoming book will teach the believer:

- Why private confrontation is a mandate and not an option for believers.
- When should they go to the other person.
- What is done when the believer goes to the other person?
 - Pray before going
 - Going in love
 - Letting other person know why they coming in private
 - Pray together before beginning
 - Seeking forgiveness if they missed the mark
 - Sharing their own similar sin before admonishing the other person
- How to accomplish all of the above

The question is often raised: Who is to go to the other person?

- Is it to be the person who has offended another, **Matthew 5:23, 24?**

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; ²⁴Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

- Is it to be the person offended, **Luke 17:3, 4?**

Take heed to yourselves : If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. ⁴ And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

The answer is: (*whether you have offended another person or have been offended*) in each case there is a mandate to go to that person in private.

The only person who should confront someone under **Matthew 18:15** is one who either has been offended or has offended someone. God never has us assume someone else's offense. However, (*as we look around the church*) there are many committed to stepping into others divisions, and very often have the bite marks to prove their efforts **Proverbs 26:17**:

He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.

Never become involved with strife that is not your own unless you are called to be a witness.

Reviewing the subsequent verses about avoiding gossip (*when applied to this ministry*) means those serving as witnesses should not have any prior knowledge about the division(s) separating brethren before meeting with both of them together since they would by doing so actually increase the strife, **Proverbs 26:20**:

Where no wood is, ^{there} the fire goeth out: so where ^{there is} no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.

Curtailing gossip may well in itself transform your church particularly once the congregation understands that listening to gossip actually increases the strife. Additional confusion is brought into the church by a number of the newer translations actually making gossip palatable since many of the newer translations attempt to use concept translation. There is no question that when someone brings gossip about another it is juicy and there is a natural tendency to hear about it. We know how tantalizing gossip is but again in this case concept translation by the

NIV and others as: *choice morsels*, do a disservice to scripture, **Proverbs 26:22**:

The words of a talebearer are as wounds⁵ (NIV choice morsels), and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. (Parenthesis added)

When we examine the actual Hebrew term (*laham*) it becomes clear that in God's eyes gossip actually causes very hurtful wounds. These wounds can cause deep hurts that often: lead to divorce, cause people to leave churches and can lead to church splits.

God understands that going to the other person in private may fail which is why God set forth the verses (**Matthew 18:16 - 20**) to provide for the time when he or she does not either hear the admonition, or is unwilling to give or receive forgiveness. It is when the private meeting fails and division remains that the church starts to fulfill its responsibility by assuring the availability of witnesses who can rightly divide God's Word and fulfill their role or office.

The misapplication of this ministry warrants a careful analysis of **Matthew 18:16**. We will also review the differences presented in the NIV. Hopefully, this will clarify the role of the witness and what they are to establish. Scripture does not support an interpretation that this passage requires bringing witnesses with actual knowledge of the trespass, but rather ones who will be able to establish God's Word between those in controversy.

The following level of analysis is to assist pastors and biblical scholars to carefully examine some very distinct differences between the received text and the text that is utilized by most of the modern translations. This level of analysis would never be presented during ministry. As previously discussed the KJV translation (*using the received text*) of **Matthew 18:16** differs significantly from most newer translations:

But if he will not hear⁶ thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth⁷ of two or three witnesses⁸ every word⁹ may be established. (Underlining Added)

We have underlined each of the words that merit careful examination. We have provided footnotes defining these critical terms. In this exhaustive examination we compare KJV with the NIV (*NIV was selected due to its wide acceptance in many churches*) and in following NIV translation we have included the KJV word in parenthesis for comparison:

¹⁶ *But if he will not listen (hear), take one or two others along, so that every matter (word) may be established by the testimony (in mouth) of two or three witnesses. (NIV © 1973, 1978, 1984) (Parenthesis and underling Added)*

This analysis will assist in you with other translations. The different applications of this verse merits this careful analysis. Very different applications naturally flow from these two

⁵ *laham law-ham'* A primitive root; properly to *burn* in, that is, (figuratively) to *rankle*: - wound.

⁶ *akouō (ak-oo'-o)* A primary verb; to *hear* (in various senses): - give (in the) audience (of), come (to the ears), ([shall]) hear (-er, -ken), be noised, be reported, understand.

⁷ *stoma (stom'-a)* Probably strengthened from a presumed derivative of the base of [G5114](#); the *mouth* (as if a *gash* in the face); by implication *language* (and its relations); figuratively an *opening* (in the earth); specifically the *front* or *edge* (of a weapon): - edge, face, mouth.

⁸ *martys (martoos)* Of uncertain affinity; a *witness* (literally [judicially] or figuratively [generally]); by analogy a "martyr": - martyr, record, witness. Note: **See Galatians 6:1** willing to give all.

⁹ *rhema (hray'-mah)* an utterance -The Greek term can mean a matter or topic, but as used in scripture and particularly in this context relating to ministry of reconciliation we believe it must be God's Word that is established. It is already bound or loosed in heaven.

translations which may partially help explain the reticence of the church to use this ministry.

Are we only to *listen* (NIV) or does scripture imply a knowledgeable *hearing* (KJV)? Is there any difference between the two terms? KJV translates the Greek term "*akouo*" as hear while NIV and some others use the term listen.

The Greek term *akouo* (See footnote 6) includes within its definition the concept of understanding. This idea of understanding meshes well with **Matthew 18:15** since winning your brother requires his understanding and acceptance of what you said to bring reconciliation. The passage points out that it is only after he did not hear you; that scripture authorizes bringing someone to confirm God's Word. Merely listening leaves open the possibility of rejecting what is said and would not bring reconciliation. We can listen to many things, but that does not include the idea of acceptance.

Consistency in translation is very important. The NIV translates this same term in the same context correctly as *hear* (not listen) and as *words* (not testimony) in **Matthew 7:24**:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. (NIV © 1973, 1978, 1984) (Underling Added)

The NIV's accurate rendering of both of these words in the foregoing passage should raise the question why would there be a change of these same Greek terms when they appear in **Matthew 18:15, 16**? KJV remained consistent in its translation of both of these terms.

Both translations use the word *take*. The Greek term is: *paralambano* and includes within its definition two meanings: a receiving with the mind and narrating to others by instruction of teachers (*used of disciples*). The Greek definition helps clarify the role or office of witness (See footnote 8). Neither of these definitions fit with the NIV rendering of the text. The Greek implies when taking witnesses they have a role or office to be fulfilled not what they saw or witnessed.

The next Greek term to examine in this verse is: *stoma* (See footnote 7). This appears to be a case where the NIV and some of the other translations utilize concept translation based upon their assumption that a witness is someone who observed something. However, it is very difficult to support this approach since the actual Greek word means mouth or literally (*a gash in the face*).

The NIV translates God's spoken Word and his mouth speaking it in **Matthew 4:4**:

"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Deuteronomy 8:3 (NIV © 1973, 1978, 1984) (Underling Added)

In this verse the NIV properly translates *rhema* as Word and *stoma* as mouth. Why would there be a change in translation of these two Greek Words in verse 16? Readers of scripture should be able to assume a consistency in translation. This is a quote from the old testament and would be very difficult to change that context. Most likely Jesus used the Greek translation of the Old testament when he quoted **Deuteronomy 8:3**. If there is a rationale for the different translation of these same terms in verse 16, I would appreciate an explanation. A similar lack of consistency is found in **Matthew 13:35** where the NIV again properly translates *stoma* as mouth.

Is it a *matter* or a *word* proceeding from that mouth? My conclusion (*based on a full scriptural analysis*) it is clearly God's Word being established by the witnesses. This confirms Paul's description of the radiant bride being cleansed by God's Word (*rhema*), **Ephesians 5:26** above.

As you saw from the definition of: *rhema* (footnote 9) a is an utterance, but it can also be defined as a *fact* or *matter*. When examining an ambiguous Greek definition, it is incumbent on Bible translators to examine how the Bible treats this term consistently in the New Testament. In the vast majority of cases it is clearly a speaking forth of God's Word. We already examined **Matthew 4:4** above. Please fully research this to confirm or reject my conclusion.

Here are several more examples that relate closely to the context of verse 16. **Matthew 12:36** requires that we will be held accountable for every *idle* word that we speak. NIV uses the term *careless* word. The only way that this passage makes sense to the author is that God holds us to a special accountability when speaking His Word. This standard would be applied to witnesses.

We also find it used a number of times relating to when Jesus spoke of Peter's denial of him, **Matthew 26:75** it is translated *word* in the NIV. One of the times it is translated as *thing* by KJV is when referring to the words spoken by the angels about Christ's birth, and in that verse it is translated *thing* also in NIV, but both translations relate it directly back to God's spoken Word, **Luke 2: 15, 17, 19**. In verse 17 both translations reveal it is God's spoken Word that the word *thing* refers. NIV uses *word* in that verse while KJV uses *saying*. Recall again that it is God's Word that cleanses the bride, **Ephesians 5:26**. This is a critical issue for the ministry, I have studied each time *rhema* is used and am fully convinced that *word* is a justified translation.

What say Ye?

Pastors should demand translators when they decide not to follow a clear or consistent Greek definition to set forth cogent reasons when changing a passage to something that would change an application of God's Word. Admittedly this has been a very tedious approach to this verse, but since these translations lead to significantly different applications of the ministry I believe this level of exposition was warranted. You will not find this type of analysis in the book. Pastors and biblical scholars may appreciate this in depth exegesis of this critical passage.

Matthew 18:16 does not necessarily require the church to be involved; however, we highly recommend that those used as witnesses are ones who can properly divide God's Word. Absent church involvement in approving witnesses the job of church leadership would be far more difficult should one or both parties reject a Word of God established by the witnesses. It is for this reason that we recommend that those chosen to exercise the office or role of witness be approved by church leadership.

The ministry of reconciliation is closely tied to church discipline and also interrelated with church governance. Church governance is often mandated by denominational directives, or even state statutes that often have little or nothing to do with God's directives for church governance. I will be posting on the web site a paper about church governance available for download for those who are interested. The intention is not for you to change your governmental structure, but rather to examine where that structure may be at variance with God's Word.

I served for a time as counsel to the unregistered churches in Michigan.¹⁰ An illustration how

¹⁰ As a postscript, we closed the Michigan unregistered Church ministry when the national organization turned into a tax protest movement.

our church governance is sometimes controlled by a need to comply with man's laws was revealed through an encounter with a pastor of an unregistered church. I confronted him as to why he was not incorporated. His response was that he could not have a registered agent of the state represent his church. I told him that was an irrational response. He responded that God had showed him! As a young Christian, I researched the law and found that in Michigan the ecclesiastical incorporation act did require the church to be in compliance with the polity of the state. It had nothing to do with a registered agent, but he had heard from God.

The real issue is not incorporation. Are you allowing God's Word to govern the operations of your local church? I am certain that God will bring you wisdom in how to assure that your church places God's Word before any contrary rules of governments or men without requiring any legal restructuring of your church, **James 1:4**. It may be worthwhile to review all your existing governance documents. A simple setting forth of a scriptural basis underlying each matter of governance will provide a legal shield for the church by making governance ecclesiastic.

As previously discussed, we experience wonderful reconciliations when God's Word is established between two people. However, unless the church is willing to exercise its authority the success decreases significantly. It should also be noted that when the church is willing to exercise its authority such exercise is seldom required.

A marriage reconciliation in one of the nation's mega churches illustrates the importance of church commitment. Throughout the orientation session the wife was closed to the process. When we came to the part about exercising church discipline, she leaned forward and for the first time became animated. She immediately asked the professional counselor (*who was representing the church*) whether they would indeed exercise church discipline. When he responded (*after a pause*) in the affirmative she leaned forward and asked where she should sign.

Historically an essential element that distinguishes the witnesses in the New Testament from those in the Old Testament when applied to the ministry of reconciliation has been overlooked. Most Bible commentators have traditionally viewed a witness as one who observed what occurred and gives evidence before a judicial tribunal. A witness with knowledge about and giving testimony in a dispute fails to adequately acknowledge God's use of witness in this context. It is actually just the opposite of a person recounting what was observed. It is a person (*who is mature in God's Word*) willing to bring God's wisdom by revealing to either or both persons how they may not be following God's Word.

The Greek term for witness (*See footnote 8 above*) denotes a person willing to commit everything to bring about reconciliation. As we have already seen the essential role and attitudes of those helping others overcome a trespass are found in **Galatians 6:1**. God uses those with a self-effacing attitude (*dying to self and placing others first*) to foster reconciliation.

An exception to not having knowledge about a dispute is when you are being a witness to the other person under **Matthew 18:15** since you would have knowledge of the dispute. Your intent is to foster healing and reconciliation. The testimony of young man who took his wife's hand and prayed understood why as a witness; he was ministering God's grace and mercy to his wife. Yes, each time you go to another person to foster reconciliation you are being used as a witness.

This is why your attitude is so important when going to a person in private.

Most ministries carrying out the ministry of reconciliation in the United States (*including ours*) arose from the outreach activities of the Christian Legal Society, and its 1982 *Tell It To The Church Conference*. The ministry arose when CLS attorneys in California led by Fred Cassidy were studying the book of **1 Corinthians**. Chapter 6 posed some challenging questions from which was born the ministry of reconciliation (*Christian Conciliation Service - CCS*), **1 Corinthians 6:1**
Dare any of you, having a matter¹¹ against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?

The *matter* referenced in this text is (*pragma*) (See footnote 11). This is a different Greek term than (*rhema*) we just studied in **Matthew 18:16**. It is clear that that when dealing with *matters* (*pragma*) (*based on our preceding extensive analysis rejecting matter*) could never result with the church utilizing the Keys of the Kingdom, or carrying out church discipline.

While the church was a central focus of the conference, churches across the country failed to make reconciliation part of their church ministry. Our ministry's focus was to the local church while most other CCS ministries had a primary focus of a para-church ministry. These ministries (*generally started by attorneys*) had a strong legal emphasis. The distinctions between the process in **1 Corinthians 6** and **Matthew 18** were not clearly perceived either by the CCS ministries nor the local churches. Our early failure to discern these differences led to confusion.

Limited clarity between these approaches arose in a discussion that took place decades ago when one of the CCS para-church ministries asserted that the ministry of reconciliation could and should be dividing property. Our ministry (*only operating through the local church*) took the position that Jesus personally rejected the responsibility of dividing property, **Luke 12:13, 14**:

And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.¹⁴ And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?

When Jesus was approached by two brothers asking Him to divide an inheritance; they were coming to the church seeking a way (*not to address underlying sin issues that created their division*) to exercise Old Testament legal authority. Jesus rejected the request by the brothers to fulfill the role of Moses by dividing property. If Jesus were to divide the property, he would have impaired true reconciliation between the brothers. The dividing of property is not envisioned in the integrated **Matthew 18: 15-20** process where the church bears ultimate authority and responsibility. It is equally true that resolving disputes about *matters* (*pragma*) before believers (*not the church*) would be better than going before the ungodly.

It would be better to take such matter to the least esteemed person in the church than enter the court system, **1 Corinthians 6:2-8** -vs. 4. Christians should choose a wise person to render such judgment (vs. 5). Para-church ministries addressing property disputes (dividing property) is clearly better than going to court. Therefore, para-church ministries operating apart from the church helping Christians resolve their differences through ADR is both biblical and God honoring.

¹¹ *pragma* *prag'-mah* a deed; by implication an *affair*; by extension an *object* (material): - business, matter, thing, work.

My own learning curve began during my the first reconciliation. Christian Legal Society executive Director Lynn Buzzard felt *(as staff counsel)* I should have the experience of being a witness. On the surface it was a property dispute between two people. After about an hour I opened my mouth *(using my legal mind)* and presented a potential approach of reconciliation that dealt with the division of property in dispute. My suggestion was immediately embraced by both people involved. As we left the house, I was feeling pretty good, when Lynn advised me that we just failed to foster reconciliation. He perceived that the underlying issue was really relating to racial prejudice and we never reached what God wanted to heal. My first lesson revealed something about the weightier matters of the law, **Matthew 23:23**.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

This started my long learning curve revealing that when we allow God 's Word to control it will bring about reconciliation. It is really an ecclesiastical process. The next step, in my learning curve, affected my law practice. Jesus rebuked the lawyers of his day, **Luke 11:46,52**:

⁴⁶ *And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.*

⁵² *Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.*

There has always been a tension between doctors and lawyers *(only Dr. Luke reported Jesus' admonition to attorneys)*. After serving as staff counsel for the conference and returning to my practice, my witness started attracting a Christian clientele and many of their disputes were with other Christians. When I read the foregoing passages, my immediate thought was they did not apply to me. After prayer and reflection, God revealed that when I advised a client: *Do not to talk to the other party I will address this with the other attorney.* I was really preventing my client from using the very reconciliation process that God established about going to the other person in private. Once I started to advise clients they should talk to the other party first, my litigation practice significantly diminished almost overnight. God worked a real healing between these two professions with Dr. Luke being the only one finally standing with Paul, **2 Timothy 4:11**.

It is essential to grasp that God's mandate about no divisions relates to a chaste bride properly prepared for her bridegroom. Failure of church leadership to embrace this ministry may *(in part)* be attributed to a lack of scholarly analysis that we have tried to provide. It is very hard to envision this chaste bride when we see devastation and divisions throughout the church. Christianity is increasingly seen as both irrelevant and *(by many)* as causing many of the world's problems. Our own government is becoming increasingly hostile to Christianity.

The world has utilized many of the underlying principles of the ministry of reconciliation without the empowerment from God's Word. Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) applies some of these principles. ADR is embraced by the courts as an improvement over litigation and in some states must be exhausted before going to trial. We have seen God has instructed Christians not to sue one another, but sadly statistics reveal that as many Christians as non-Christians are involved in litigation. In our educational system it is known as conflict resolution. Yet, true peace only comes through God's Word.

I recently had an opportunity to recommend that our Supreme Court adopt this process as an

alternative for Christians facing a divorce. Domestic relations cases (*many between Christians*) are clogging the dockets. In good conscience I could not make that recommendation since churches are not ready to accept their responsibility. A somewhat similar tribal approach is now being utilized in a model program in one court, but obviously God's Word will not be the focus of healing and restoration under that model. The Court Administrator was immediately opposed to God's Word being used even between Christians under their free exercise rights.

Consistent precedent exists within our legal system that courts are unable to address ecclesiastical matters. If we treat God's Word with reverence and accept its predominance to govern our lives and the operation of our churches, then it becomes an ecclesiastical matter that the Courts are unable to address. This is not a suggestion to become legalistic but rather to recognize His Word must govern our relationships with other brothers and sisters. Once that becomes the way we conduct our lives, and the church accepts its authority and responsibility then and only then can we expect the legal system to recognize that reality.

We handled a case where a Circuit Judge in Michigan ruled on this issue. It was in a divorce action brought by a wife of a *deacon* who had become involved in adultery. The church retained our office on the part of the wife and we petitioned the Court not to dissolve the marriage until after the church completed its church discipline thereby allowing the church to permit the wife to allow an unbeliever to depart (*obviously after completing church discipline*), **1 Corinthians 7:15:**

But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

We argued to the court that God's Word required the church to complete this ecclesiastical process prior to the court granting the divorce. The Court denied the motion (*following an hour of testimony*) the Judge determined the motion was untimely filed. The Court held (*based on the testimony*) that most likely the church would complete its discipline process before the court had to rule on the matter. The Court also held that if the ecclesiastical process was not completed that the motion could be renewed and he would then rule on the merits of the motion.

I recall the case where a young man was held in contempt of court for bringing his bible into the courtroom and attempting to refer to God's Word in his divorce case. Sadly, he was not represented by counsel, and did not have all the churches in the community supporting him.

God's Word brings true reconciliation. Some question whether presenting God's Word is sufficient. One argument we have heard is that relationships are complex and God's Word could not possibly anticipate the divisions we experience today. Looking back at the numerous complex broken relationships we have encountered in the course of the ministry, we have always found that divisions invariably are grounded in either rejecting or not properly perceiving God's Word. His Word is sufficient!

God's word is used for doctrine, bringing correction (*admonition - with tears*) and instruction about becoming who God called us to be. This is not my promise, but God's. Why did not God bring a theologian credentialed by a seminary to present this overlooked and often rejected ministry. Perhaps, if God can use a donkey then He may have selected properly.

You might want to consider the following as an option for implementing the ministry: Include

instruction in the ministry of reconciliation as part of the process of moving from being a church attendee to committed fellowship in your church. You could also have a special teaching for those already in committed fellowship that would train them to serve as witnesses.

This is your ministry and not mine. We can only serve as an adjunct to assist your ministry of reconciliation. Over the years we have refused to help people if their church was unwilling to carry out the ministry. We have (*on occasion*) even seen God's chastisement of those few leaders who intentionally rejected God's Word.

We began this letter with a prophetic proclamation by God. Does God intend for this letter to be a prophetic utterance to the church? You will note that I have never proclaimed that anything I have said is to be considered prophetic. My perspective is that with the delivery of John's prophecy all foretelling has been completed. This leaves only the prophetic responsibility of telling forth God's Word. This requires both a proper dividing of God's Word and equally important a correct application of God's Word to the individual(s) involved. Obviously, if one were to proclaim to a person in adultery God's position about adultery it would be a prophetic use of God's Word. However, if it was given to a person not involved in the sin or on the cusp thereof it would not be a prophetic Word, but it still is God's Word being presented.

Hopefully you will find this letter has properly divided God's Word that established His ministry of reconciliation. However, whether this is a prophetic Word is another question. Does God want this message brought to the church at this time? This should be seen as more of a teaching since I am not speaking to an individual church. Whether it is prophetic to your church today must be left for each pastor to discern. The Holy Spirit can bring conviction. I would also encourage the letter being shared with those you believe operate in the gift prophecy or fulfill the office of prophet within your church, **1 Corinthians 14:32**.

And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

If I have heard from God, and this message is for the church at this time, it may have a greater impetus for application within your fellowship. I am not making such a proclamation. If I find this call is confirmed by those God has called to the office of prophet, I will certainly let the churches know about such a confirmation.

Has the Lord used me prophetically in the past? I recall when President Elect Clinton came on the radio, and first announced: *Don't ask; Don't tell*. I was strongly convicted that his local church needed to address the issue. My wife properly advised me that I did not even know the church and certainly had no relationship with the pastor to say anything. That occurred on a Sunday afternoon. God must have heard my heart. On Monday morning I received a phone call from Little Rock Arkansas about a referral for a private adoption in a nearby community. This was the first and only time that I ever received a referral from Arkansas. After explaining that we could not do private adoptions in Michigan, I asked if the attorney happened to be in President Elect William Jefferson Clinton's church. He responded that he was not, but that his partner was head of the deacon board in that church.

My letter went out that day. I have no idea what happened after the letter was received. I have learned that when God wants something conveyed that is all He requires. In retrospect, had the church acted immediately presenting God's Word, and had the President heard God's Word

(entailing a repentant heart), then his legacy might have been far more salutatory. I am not giving this testimony to say that this is a prophetic message. All I knew *(at that time)* was a strong urging to direct a message to the President Elect's church. I did not consider it to be prophetic.

Now upon looking back and reviewing both the unique way God opened the doors to present the message, and what subsequently transpired that might have been averted am I able to say that it **might** have been a prophetic utterance where God wanted to allow the President an opportunity to move in a different direction. This would also mean that God's heart was for the President.

The way we have conducted the ministry since 1983 may not be the exact model you may implement within your church, but how it is implemented is your decision. As pastor you are the one who will give account to God for those He has given you, **Hebrews 13:17**. It is a ministry given to the local church, and in your role as pastor you are the one to determine how God would utilize this ministry within your church.

One reason for the existing framework for the ministry comes from what has happened legally. One of the early cases involved a member of a church who was confronted about her sin. She indicated that she never agreed to be bound to such standards and advised the church she was resigning her membership. The deacons confronted her in the parking lot of a grocery store and indicated she could not resign and that they would be removing her from the church before the entire congregation. Yes, that church did properly face a significant judgment. The process we recommend allows those in committed relationship within the church to request the church to establish God's Word between them in restoring relationship and to exercise church discipline *(for the purpose of restoration)* if they should reject God's Word. There is no authority for the church to address those who are not in a committed relationship within the church.

Let me make the following commitment to you. If you find that we have properly divided God's Word and you believe that what is being presented is truth, I will do all within my power to assure that you personally have the tools you need to present the ministry to your church, and will endeavor to see that your church's lack of resources will never be a reason to reject this ministry.

All divisions eventually come back to a violation or side slipping from God's Word. The process of reconciliation is joyous and proclaims a witness to the community as destroyed relationships are miraculously restored. This is witnessing the power and authority of God's Word. If you have any questions, we would be pleased to answer them. All suggestions will be considered, and any rebuke would be appreciated.

Maranatha,

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