

WHATS WRONG WITH THE CHURCH IN AMERICA

By Jim Smith

Jesus tells John in the book of Revelation to write to the seven churches, "write the things you have seen, and the things that are, and the things which will take place after this." These things include warnings, encouragements, and prophesy of what Jesus will do if the churches do not listen to Him. Well I am no prophet and I have no revelation from Jesus about the state of the church, but the scripture never changes, Jesus says in Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." So if we can look at what the scripture says and compare this to the way the American church is living out its faith in God, we can maybe see areas where the American church needs to repent in order to please God our Savior. The church is the apple in Jesus' eye, but so was Israel, but how many times did they wonder from God's words and God would warn them and eventually judgment came and the results were God's Spirit departed from them and they lost their protection and strength to do what God wanted them to do. Has the American church lost the Spirit to produce true repentance and fruit in our church's, does Jesus have a few ideas what His church should be and what needs to change? This is my attempt to help the church to come to repentance, with the help of the Spirit through the Word of God.

Chapter one.

The church is not preaching the true Gospel of Jesus. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" Mark 1:15 What is God's interpretation of the Gospel? The theology of the Gospel is God justifying guilty sinners by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by God's grace, sanctification of the sinner through the power of the Holy Spirit to create a new man in the image of the Son, and glorification of a sinner when he or she goes to be with the LORD. God's plan is to forgive, restore and finally to restore people like they were in the beginning when God created everything good. So where does the church fall short. Lets look at John 3, what was Jesus telling Nicodemus? The first thing he tells Nicodemus is that man can not enter the Kingdom of God without a new birth. What does that look like?" Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them." Matthew 7:17-20 Jesus is concerned about fruit. Many times He says you can do nothing without me. What is fruit? It is a person whom the Holy Spirit has made alive and there is evidence of repentance. Think of Matthew the tax collector. He was a cheat and a dishonest man, but after meeting Jesus he became a new man. How about Zacchaeus? Here was another dishonest man who after meeting Jesus wanted to make things right by giving four times the amount he took from people. What happens to the people in the Bible who are truly saved. They repent. They have a desire to do what is right. "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one

another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD.

"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." Jeremiah 31:33-34
So what does the church in America teach? That all a person has to do is accept Jesus in their hearts. The church likes to quote John 3:16 and say it is all about faith and trust, and make it easy for people to be saved. But is that what Jesus teaches? Jesus Himself says, "Repent and believe the good news!"

Lets look at some more of John 3. "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God." John 3:19-21 Here again Jesus says that people hate the light, and they will not come into the light because their deeds are evil. What is Jesus trying to tell Nicodemus? People need to reverse their lives, repent, because people who live by the truth it will be plain to everyone that what has been done, has been done by God. If we think about Gods total plan of salvation, again it is justification, sanctification, and glorification. Is God so naïve as to not know the difference between someone who just believes or someone who is truly born again? Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness." 2Timothy 2:19 Or is the church so naïve to think that saying a prayer of salvation without repentance will bring a person to true saving faith? This is why the church is so weak, there is no Spirit in a lot of it's members. The main problem of man is his rebellious nature towards Gods ways. Man does not want to submit to Gods authority. Man does not want to go to hell or pay for what his rebellion deserves. Right from the beginning man got mad when confronted with his wrongdoing. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." Gen. 4:4-7 So man wants to be justified, but not sanctified. Does God accept Justification without sanctification? Does God want smart sinners? Paul also says the same thing in Galatians. After spending five chapters arguing for the Jewish brothers to remember Gods grace and that faith is the only correct response to Jesus. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Galatians 6:7-9 Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship

Now some may argue that it is Gods grace and faith alone that saves. This is a Biblical truth. But repentance is a gift of Gods grace too. Who could possibly repent if God did not help man by His Spirit. All we can boast about is Gods grace and empowerment by the Spirit to do the will of God. In the end we will praise the LORD for Jesus' death and resurrection and praise Him for His Spirit that empowered us to obey. So the church needs to teach what Jesus says. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Chapter two.

The church is too concerned about it's comfort. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you-you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, `What shall we eat?' or `What shall we drink?' or `What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matthew 6:19-34

What's important to the American church? Multiple sanctuaries to please the differences in peoples tastes for music. Large gym's to bring the kids in. Stations with coffee and donuts to serve the people who come to church. Larger church buildings with multiple areas to meet peoples needs. What does this lead to. Are we feeding the flesh of our people? Larger debt. Is the church inward looking, trying to please Americans who already have too much? What does Jesus want from the church? But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. What does this look like? Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

"If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. Isaiah 58:6-12

Is the American church concerned with those who are oppressed, injustice for those that need real justice? Does the church clothe the naked those that have nothing, or do we buy Christmas presents for our families that have everything? Now I know Americans are a giving people. We have food pantries in every city. We support pro life organizations that fight for the right of life. There are multiple Christian organizations that feed the poor around the world. But are we really making an impact as much as Jesus would like us to? Every time we spend another million dollars to build a gym to bring the kids in, can't they go down to the High school? How much do we spend on comfort in the church verses using Gods resources to reach the world? We need to ask ourselves how comfortable do the people in the church need to be or is being comfortable make us complacent? Jesus tells us not to think about what we wear, how to dress our church buildings. When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Matthew 8:18-20

Jesus sent out the disciples two by two with only what they had with them. When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them: "Take nothing for the journey-no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere. Luke 9:1-6

Does the church believe that the Spirit and the Word is enough to grow the Kingdom? Jonathon Leeman has written a wonderful book, Reverberation, which challenges us to rely on the Power of Gods Word, because it is the Word empowered by the Spirit that changes mans heart. Do we really need more comfortable church buildings? Are we too concerned about the comfort of our people verses challenging the church to deny itself and change Gods world by getting involved in injustice, oppression of the weak, clothing the naked, etc? Is the American church servants of those that are really needy?

Chapter three.

The church does not think very highly of Gods law. Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither- whatever they do prospers. Psalm 1:1-3

Listen to sermons today from the church. Because of so much emphasis on grace in preaching, Gods law has been so down played that it no longer seems necessary for Christians to delight in it. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God- the

gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. Romans 1:1-6 17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:17-20 Does the American church teach the ten commandments? The Heidelberg catechism did. The protestant church after the reformation thought it important enough that they say in the catechism, part three- "mans gratitude and obedience- new life through the Holy Spirit."

And in this chapter they teach about discipleship and good works. I do not think the American church even knows what is meant by the first commandment. We think that if we are feeling love for Jesus we are doing fine. But what does it say? What is idolatry? . Idolatry is to imagine or inventing something in which one trusts in place of or alongside of the only true God, who has revealed himself in the Word. Page 97. Is this teaching too hard for the church here. We trust our Toyota s, we trust in our nice comfy society, we trust in politicians to get us more tax freedom. But do we in our minds and hearts truly trust God in all circumstances? Does the church teach this? What is Gods heart when it comes to the law? Is it only to bring sinners to Christ, or is it something He desires of His people after being saved? Again I remind you the chief problem with man is rebellion. We don't like to go 55. We get mad when our boss corrects us. We don't want anyone to tell us what we should do. We are Americans, we have rights. When was the last time you heard the church teach the ten commandments to children? "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, `Know the LORD,' Jeremiah 31:33-34 Gods desire is that His people have His laws written on their hearts. Sometimes the church preaches so much on how much Gods unconditional love is towards us, that as sinners we think there is no consequences for disobedience. The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9. Even after we are saved, is this not true at times? Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. So what would happen if the church would meditate on Gods law day and night? Probably revived men and women. In the third year of his reign he sent his officials Ben-Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel and Micaiah to teach in the towns of Judah. With them were certain Levites-Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah and Tob-Adonijah-and the priests Elishama and Jehoram. They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the LORD; they went around to all the towns of Judah and

taught the people. The fear of the LORD fell on all the kingdoms of the lands surrounding Judah, so that they did not go to war against Jehoshaphat. 11 Some Philistines brought Jehoshaphat gifts and silver as tribute, and the Arabs brought him flocks: seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred goats. Jehoshaphat became more and more powerful; he built forts and store cities in Judah and had large supplies in the towns of Judah. He also kept experienced fighting men in Jerusalem. 2Chronicles 7:17-14

Chapter four

The church does not teach the importance of a servant's life. Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:23-28 How many churches have the problem of 20% of the church does 100% of the work. We laugh about this, but what does Jesus think about the 80%. "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,[a] each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.' "So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Matthew 25:14-30 According to this passage Jesus will reward those that are faithful servants with what God gives them, and those that are fearful and lazy their talents will be taken from them. Now if we love the people in the church, shouldn't we exhort and encourage people to use what God has given them so they can get

rewarded at the end? Why don't people want to serve in our churches? Some excuses might be, I'm too busy, I'm too tired, my job is so demanding, I don't have anything to contribute, etc. But does Jesus except our excuses? People that think they have nothing to contribute might not trust Jesus enough to do anything. The disciples were just ordinary men, unschooled who relied on Jesus through the Spirit to do impossible things. Jesus sent them out two by two with out anything to preach the Kingdom. When they came back they were amazed what God had done. They had seen Jesus do wonderful things, but I am sure they were a little apprehensive at first, when Jesus first sent them out, but they went. People who are always tired, what about the Spirit? The Spirit give us strength and empowers us daily to do Gods will. If we are relying and praying for the Spirits strength why are we so tired? Is God not faithful or is there something wrong with us? It is not common in the church to hear the words commitment, dedication, responsible these days. Why is that? The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. `Master,´ he said, `you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.´ It takes commitment, hard work to double our own businesses. So what does Jesus expect of us? Do we give Him what's left over of our service or do we give Him something else? Does the church teach the importance of being a servant? Does the church teach the results of not serving? " So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.´ "His master replied, `You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. "`So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.´ Matthew 25:14-30 Can we take Jesus' words literally in these passages? Are we concerned enough about people to encourage them to serve so Jesus will say, "well done good and faithful servant. "

Chapter five

The church isn't praying the way God intended. The Lord's prayer is our example. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. "This, then, is how you should pray:"`Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation,[a] but deliver us from the evil one.[b]´ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 6:5-15 It says in this passage that God already knows what we need. But how do we pray? We spend the majority of our time, give us our daily bread. Or in other words we pray for our needs. If anyone

has read any good books on the Lord's prayer, you will see we don't just repeat this prayer. So Jesus gave us an example here of subject to meditate on. So how does Jesus want the church to pray? God already knows our needs so He wants us to focus on what He wants first. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. How much time do we give meditating on these verses? When we think of God as our Father do we think of verses that tell us what God our Father is like? Do we spend time thinking of God's Holy names? Throughout the Bible God has revealed who He is. How can we know His character till we meditate on His names and what they mean? Do we pray for God's kingdom to come here on earth? Do we know what God's kingdom is here on earth? Do we pray for God's will to be done? Are we concerned with God's will rather than what we want? Paul prays in Colossians 1:9-14 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,^[e] so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you^[f] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Paul prays for growth in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all power, great endurance and patience. When we have more knowledge of who God is we have great faith. When we have strength from God we can do great things for God. When we have endurance and patience we will have great love. The other part of the Lord's prayer is important too. And lead us not into temptation,^[a] but deliver us from the evil one. Does the church pray for the strength to overcome temptations. Our Lord says we live in an evil world and there are many temptations out there. Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit in order to resist the devil, and so we need the Holy Spirit even more. Do we know there is a Spiritual battle out there and are we praying accordingly? Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Ephesians 6:10-20 So does the church need to learn to pray better and what will that accomplish? Well hopefully our faith will increase and more of God's will, will be done and God's blessings will fall from Heaven.

Chapter six

The church doesn't apply the teaching of God's Word to their lives. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it-not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it-they will be blessed in what they do. James 1:22-25 Is there evidence of the blessed life that comes from doing what the Word says? Are peoples lives being changed or does the church listen on Sundays, go to Bible studies during the week, conferences that are fun and exciting, but there is no growth in their lives. "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. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." Matthew 7:24-27

Do you ever wonder why the people in the church have the same problems, when the scripture says we should be overcomers? We pray for each other, we feel the pain of our friends problems, but nothing changes. Jesus says "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33 So where is the faith and joy of overcoming life's situations? This may seem hard, but ask people after Sundays sermons what it was about and I don't know if they could tell you. How about going to a conference. Someone may say, wow the music was great, we had a lot of fun, but what about God's Word? Do you have something you need to apply so you can change? It is hard work to change our thinking and our lives, and it's easy to stay the same. Jesus is so good, just like a good parent. He sees the potential in us , through the power of His Holy Spirit. When I was a child my mom wanted me to learn how to play an instrument, I wanted to have fun. It took lessons and discipline to learn the French horn, but eventually I enjoyed music so much more after learning to play. So shouldn't we want to learn to play better at life? The old hymn trust and obey is the only way, to be happy in Jesus, is to trust and obey. But are people trusting more and obeying? Does the church overcome their personal problems? If the church had great faith in Jesus there would be less fearful people, and the church would be bolder and make more of an impact on our world.

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off-for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. Acts 2:14-41 Now

I know this was the start of the church and God was doing a wonderful thing here, but Peter was just an ordinary man like us and God used him to do great things. Does the church think it can do great things for God, or do we sit each week in our buildings and wish things would change? Is the church attempting to change society around us for God's Kingdom?

This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. You said, 'No, we will flee on horses.' Therefore you will flee! You said, 'We will ride off on swift horses.' Therefore your pursuers will be swift! A thousand will flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five you will all flee away, till you are left like a flagstaff on a mountaintop, like a banner on a hill." Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! Isaiah 30:15-18 God says in this passage that the church should have confidence and strength, and by repentance and trust in our old thoughts and actions this will be brought about. But is there change? Is there rest and confidence in God? Or do we continue to do things in our own ways and rush around trying to find people or things to help us overcome the problems we have in this life? I can think of my own experience. At one time in my Christian walk I had little faith, and I was very anxious about everything. What did I do? I went to see a Christian counselor and he put me on medication. This went on for a few years, but the more medication I took or the more doctors I saw it did not help. What I needed was to learn to trust God more. I needed to learn to rest and trust even though my emotions and thoughts were saying something different. As I learned this, eventually I didn't need medications and doctors.

So is the church growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, or are is it riding on swift horses for the next experience, Christian conference, or another way to overcome the situations in their lives?

Chapter seven

Well I have tried in this short book to give some insights how the church in America has possibly fallen short of what Jesus wants from His people. As I said at the beginning, I am no prophet or have no special revelation from Jesus concerning these matters. Jesus said, "By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Matthew 7:16-19 Now Jesus is talking about false prophets here, but the church is suppose to bear fruit, and it says you will be able to recognize this fruit. Do we recognize the Spiritual growth of the Kingdom in the church here? If not what are we praying and doing about it? Are there ways we can improve the Spiritual lives of the church in America or are we satisfied with the way it is? Is Jesus satisfied with the church, or does He want more from it.