



Energized Church

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FOREWORD

This devotional booklet was a true labor of love for Jesus Christ. I give Him all praise and glory for revealing to me first the reassuring power, grace and holiness that only He possesses, and secondly and most convicting, the uncomfortable truths about my sinful self- against the backdrop of His righteousness through scripture, and on the most intimate level, what I need to do to be more like Him. Finding the energy to research and study the absolute truth of scripture was not the obstacle; indeed, submitting myself to God's will to study, absorb, and expound scripture came with such great resolve and intensity that- praise God- I had no choice but to follow His magnificent call in doing so. More honestly speaking, the secondary struggle of time management had proved the greater obstruction. As I undertook the work of writing this, and researching and reading about the many conflicts facing today's church, in parallel it occurred to me that one of the most prevalent hindrances to the modern church today is indeed misguided and ineffective time management to submit to God's will. It is an issue of first understanding the perfect will of God, and then committing to action His call. Clearly, today's church is distracted by it's own primary agenda, catering to the farcical whim and popular opinion of worldly influence and not responding to the immediate radical, sweeping changes required in one's life to the effectual and sacrificial service to the church body and ultimately, to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This very fact made me re-evaluate my own life and confront my personal struggles of time management, procrastination, and planning. I then asked the critical ques-

tions: Am I wasting God's time on my own preconceived plans? What am I doing, specifically today, as a son and servant of Jesus Christ, to advance His kingdom? Like David in Psalm 39:4 and 5, I am given the certainty that my days on earth are numbered:

"*4Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the extent of my days, let me know how transient I am. 5Behold, Thou hast made my days as handbreaths, and my lifetime as nothing in Thy sight, surely every man at his best is a mere breath.*" [New American Standard Translation*]

It is an absolute of earthly life's brevity. God makes our days as 'handbreaths'- in short, we have no time to waste. Moreover, we cannot continue to waste *His* time.

This devotional study has been gleaned from a sermon series from Ephesians of the same title, as preached by the Rev. Robert G. Froese from the pulpit at Faith Fellowship Church, in Clarence, New York, in the summer of 2008. These sermons exhorting God's deliverance of strength and hope through submission to His will and the required active obedience by His church, served to both spiritually electrify and unite my local family of Christ in greater service to each other and God. This devotional is in turn, an appreciation for Rev. Froese's white-hot fervor for Jesus Christ, and his personal desire to see all men run, not walk, toward the cross of salvation and receive firsthand, the Lord's grace, power, and loving embrace. This work is a mere extension of those remarkable and liberating weeks of learning God's awesome love and purpose

for His church, and through it I pray that you would truly know Jesus Christ as the source and example of obedient servanthood, giving preference to others, and be able to in turn serve brothers and sisters with a more grateful, willing, and excited heart!

To God forever be the glory!

Bob Shannon
January 2010

** The New American Standard Bible (NASB) translation has been used for scriptural reference throughout this devotional.*

INTRODUCTION

Churches today, like individuals, find themselves enmeshed in so many programs, agendas, and initiatives that the execution of God's plan takes a back seat to the busyness and distractions that consume them. We barely have time to catch our breath at the end of one task before throwing ourselves headlong into the next one. We live, work, and play in a marvelous God-created world that is amazing and awesome; yet we spend little time reflecting on or appreciative of its sheer physical grandeur, the beautiful and miraculous work of Jesus Christ (the church and His servants) living and serving within it, or the supreme holiness and majesty of the Creator, God Himself. We are so enthralled with the ingenuity and construction of our own plans, that the bigger picture of God's wondrous, predestined outcome for His kingdom is overlooked, even ignored. Is it any wonder then, as the church serves its own agenda and does not act on the perfect counsel and timing of God, its members find themselves frustrated, impatient, and discontented? Or, that churchgoers can be bitter, unforgiving, and unwilling to sacrificially serve others?

Such is my sinful dilemma and that of the modern church. We have become increasingly self reliant, not God reliant. We do not surrender willingly to do the critical and necessary work of God in our church, but somehow find gratification and satisfaction in futile, self-serving activity which does nothing toward advancing His kingdom. We see the temporal, not the eternal. Jesus Christ makes it succinctly clear. He is most glorified by drawing people to Himself and turning them from rebels to

sons and daughters fulfilling His will. We absolutely cannot do His work, or unify our churches to His single purpose, or receive His blessings, without the immediate and total response to His call to obey Him, think less of ourselves, serve others and ultimately glorify Him. As the apostle Paul states in Romans 12:3:

"³For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."

Paul warns about conceit, pride, and self-glorification in relation to the church. Rather, we are to give preference to one another for His service according to the faith He has revealed in each one of us. It was this same preference of Jesus Christ to serve others, in the name of love – His unsurpassed love- so that all men can have the opportunity to know Him, love Him, and serve Him. That is the call of the faithful.

POWER ON

Let's Get Pumped Up!
Ephesians 4:11-12

"¹¹And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ."

Where do you, and others called by God, specifically fit in to the ministry of Jesus Christ? We start with identifying and describing the characteristics of those called by the Lord for specific service, in the areas of spreading, teaching, exhorting, and distributing His Word. Each one is identified with a purpose of ministry for God's kingdom and the advancement of scripture, as revealed to each individually. Note that not all serve the same purpose; each has a specific role according to the gifts and talents that God has provided.

Apostles are those who have "been sent forth" as an ambassador, or representative of the one who sends him. For the explicit work of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry, twelve men [Matthew 10:2-4] were selected for this task. The qualifications for apostles included seeing the Lord and being an eyewitness to His resurrection [Acts 1:22, 1 Corinthians 9:1]; bestowment of signs and miracles [Acts 2:3-4, Acts 2:43, Acts 5:12-16, Acts 8:16-17, Acts 9:26-41, Mark 16:17-8, Hebrews 2:3-4]; and being chosen by Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit [Matthew 10:1-2]. Apostles were privileged, in that the requirement as witnesses to the resurrection was very exclusive. Notice that the requirements

say nothing of preferential moral character or spiritual stature. These men were chosen from a variety of occupations, personalities, social status, and even faith. They were fishermen, zealots (extremists to the overthrow of local authority), tax collectors, and scourges. In any view, these men were unimpressive; low class, minor citizens, and outcasts. They were neither wealthy, nor popular, or of high esteem, yet the Lord *chose* them- and *equipped* them- for His work. Obviously, Jesus knew the inner heart and character of these men, that they would be the ones to pledge loyalty (except for Judas Escariot), become faithful, life-long sacrificial servants (even some to the point of martyrdom), and become charismatic church leaders and teachers- all for the glory of God and advancement of His kingdom. God has the power and wisdom to be able to call anyone to His service, even the most unlikely or inconspicuous among men. For each one He calls His child, He has a purpose and calling. God is unmistakable in His selection. He uses all He has created for His high purpose.

The apostles did not approach their calling by God simply with the attitudes of 'positive thinking', doing God's work on their own accord, in their own timing, or at their own convenience, or by their own reasoning. As Jesus Christ lead them, taught them, and encouraged them, they had received training on Jesus' way of 'powerful thinking'...a joyful mandate fulfilled by the capacity and privilege to serve, honor, and worship Jesus Christ and to do His work, to advance the gospel message, and advance His kingdom. This power is not common to natural man but received by the Holy Spirit through acceptance of Christ. The power that proceeds from the Holy

Spirit befits His glory [Isaiah 61:1], for the work He calls His servants to:

" ¹The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners."

And from John 15:26-

" ²⁶When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me."

Energized churches, embodying the strength of the Holy Spirit, are subject to attack by Satan and the powers of darkness. Because Satan seeks to deceive and divide believers, energized churches and committed broken servants of Jesus Christ must be ever vigilant to resist sinful persuasion by Satan. Energized churches must stand firm in the responsibility to God's calling with self-control, discipline, and the avoidance of self-indulgences. In 1 Corinthians 9:21-9:27, an illustration of the responsibility of standing firm in faith, and in 1 Corinthians 10:1-10 the contrasting disqualification is given.

"^{9:21}To those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. ²²To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. ²³And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I

may become a fellow partaker of it. ²⁴Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵And everyone who competes in the games exercises self control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified."

"^{10:1}For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. ⁶Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. ⁷And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." ⁸Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. ⁹Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. ¹⁰Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer."

Self-righteousness and pride is not pleasing to God; succumbing to lust, idolatry, immorality, and complaining define evil. These things are abhorrent to the Lord, and can sap the energy of a church. Active and energized servants within the church body must be disciplined to leading lives of personal holiness. In this regard, each committed broken servant of Jesus Christ must run a race of faith, pursuing after Jesus Christ and righteousness (the prize). Like a 'spiritual athlete', we exercise ourselves to Godliness, running the race with endurance. Each of us struggle with our own sources of pride, selfishness, and self-righteousness, which hinder God's work in ministry. Survey and assess now those areas in your life where you suffer 'stumbling blocks', that keep you from fulfilling God's role.

In Ephesians 4:11 & 4:12 we should also notice very carefully that God's pattern for producing servants with powerful faith, personal holiness, and genuine love is not limited to pastors and elders to do all the work of the ministry. God is very specific about His servant's roles and calling. He uses pastors and elders to equip others for completing the work of the His ministry as undertaken by the local congregation of believers (saints), to edify the church body through Godly service, brotherly encouragement, nurturing of each other's faith, and maintaining the confident assurance of God's promises. The origin and the goal of Christian ministry is that it begins with Jesus Christ, who gives spiritual gifts and gifted people to the church who are then enabled to further build up the church body by their enduring faith [2 Corinthians 13:3-9 below] through all things, doing all things for the truth:

3since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. 4For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we shall live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you. 5Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you- unless indeed you fail the test? 6But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test. 7Now we pray to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we should appear unapproved. 8For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth. 9For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete.

As men and women believers are made complete [1 Thessalonians 3:9-13], there is a wonderful pattern of the progressive application in knowledge, faith, and love. This application translates into the living, dynamic, God-appointed process that moves people to serve Him, and the church body, sacrificially. Jesus first transforms the heart, and from there the exciting transformations from heart to heart, believer to believer, servant to servant become manifest in the outpouring of love to each other!

As believers, we are also then responsible for the perseverance in the faith of other brothers and sis-

ters [Hebrews 3:12-14] and to assemble in unity with faith [Hebrews 10:22-25]. Through a concerted effort together, we are to exhort one another to Jesus Christ and His work, not to individual agenda, separate interests, motives, or self-serving idealisms. The labor of the church, then, is to benefit the entire church body and the servants within. In pursuit of the common goal (to become more like Jesus Christ), we should be exhorting each other through obedience to His word. By taking care of our bodies in this manner, we strengthen it to stand against temptation and Satan, present our bodies to God for His service [Romans 12:1], for His glorification [Philippians 1:20, 1 Corinthians 10:31], recognizing that our bodies ultimately belong to Him [1 Corinthians 6:15, 20].

RECHARGE (SUMMARY)

God lovingly selects and equips all those fit for specific ministries. A godly servant is not restricted by physical human limitations, social reputation, or stature; the pre-requisite for servanthood is only an abiding faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Energized churches are exposed to attacks by the powers of darkness; exercising to godliness and spiritual discipline (living in obedience, studying God's word) enable the church to thwart advances by Satan.

The origin of the Christian ministry is Jesus Christ, who gives spiritual gifts and gifted people to the church; the goal is the building up of the body of Christ in knowledge, faith, and love.

Believers are responsible for self-perseverance of their faith, as well as the faith of their brothers and sisters, exhorting all toward personal holiness.

SURGE (APPLICATION)

Read and meditate on Philippians 3:13-14. What is the 'prize' that Paul refers to in this passage?

Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 4:7-11. How is spiritual discipline exercised currently in your life? In what ways can you advance your personal spiritual discipline NOW toward greater understanding and teaching others of God's Word?

Read and study Hebrews 12:1-3. Give your own definition of spiritual 'endurance'. Explain the benefits of spiritual endurance and suffering for the name of Jesus Christ. --

BOOST (DEEPER STUDY)

Instruction Concerning Dangers to the Church and Believers:

1 Timothy 1:3-11

1 Timothy 4:1-11

Holiness:

Psalm 119:1-3

Romans 6:12-14

2 Timothy 2:19-22

Spiritual Gifts:

1 Corinthians 12

Ephesians 4

Romans 12

POWER ON

“Unified in Confidence, Conviction, and Cause”
Ephesians 4:13

“¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

Any time that the Word of God is preached, you will undoubtedly make one of three decisions: a decision to obey fully, or partially, or not at all. Will you obey? Some say emphatically yes, without commitment. There will be some that will be influenced emotionally by ‘preacher charisma’ and actually forget what they committed to ten minutes later. They will be so captivated by the dynamic delivery of the message that the essence and meaning of the message was overlooked or misunderstood. The factors of accountability, responsibility, exhortation and duty (what you are called to do) become secondary and subsequently neglected. The response is positive and affirming, but it is empty, as it does not count the cost. Luke 14:28-30 describes the caution we must heed to carefully consider the cost of fully committing to Jesus Christ:

“²⁸For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, ³⁰saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’”

Another response may be a partial affirmation, or a conditional acceptance. The measure of obedience is tempered by the person's individual desires and wishes. This hearer of the Word might say or think- 'what's in it for me?', only interested in the immediate personal benefit or gain realized in the obedient act. The effectual service out of love for Jesus Christ, and subsequently for His followers (the church body) is not considered a factor in the decision. It is purely self-motivated and encompasses no compassion or benefit to others. The decision to obey is based on the overall affect on the person's lifestyle. It is a decision of private convenience, of no personal cost, of no external merit, nor out of love of anything but self. The person may be aware of impending change needed in their lifestyle to accommodate the service, but is unwilling and unmotivated to change. Hence, the act of obedience is a shaky compromise of faith and personal desire, a weak faith that is quickly disregarded or abandoned at the first requirement of accountability and responsibility. It is simply easier for this person to float along with a minimal effort or commitment regarding their faith in Jesus Christ and His commandments. Rather than being Christ-led, this person picks and chooses the ministries of service based on their selfish, unsacrificing lifestyle. The message to the church at Laodicea [Revelation 3:15, 16] was clear about living this lifestyle of partial obedience:

"¹⁵I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth."

Laodicea was an ancient city in the Roman province of Asia Minor and its church was established around the time of the apostle Paul's ministry from 50-60 A.D. It was one of several churches along with those that were developed in nearby Hierapolis and Colossae, and is mentioned in the book of Colossians five times. Laodicea is included in the address to the seven churches in Revelation (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea), and like its sister churches was established in a city of prosperity and wealth. These churches and their citizens, while flourishing materially, financially, and socially, had become disobedient to their faith and had forgotten about their first love, Jesus Christ. [Revelation 2: 4,5]. Jesus speaks of the "lampstand" being moved [Revelation 2:5] from their place:

"Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-unless you repent."

This is in reference to Jesus Christ's warning of removing the usefulness of the church unless there is repentance from sin and restoration and reunion with Jesus Christ. These churches were once spiritually thriving in unity and service to Jesus Christ, but had forsaken the unity that Christ purchased and guaranteed with His own blood. This unity, which must be prevalent for the true energized church of today, must be acknowledged through realizing that Jesus Christ has already made us one- one body, one family, one church of local committed broken servants, sharing the unity of our faith in Jesus Christ for His glorification. We

must not, as a church body, let this knowledge of exclusivity with Christ (we are one with Him) pass or diminish due to our sin of spiritual negligence, indifference, or indiscipline. Ephesians 2:11-22 conceptualizes for us the unification of one body- the body of Christ which is the fullness of all of Him:

"¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace."

Paul is writing specifically about the reconciliation and unification of Jews and Gentiles, and how through Him all have access in one Spirit to the Father [Ephesians 2:18]. But it is further the togetherness of the body (everyone in the body) that is the source of growth for the Lord's work! Therefore, we can have confidence in the unity of our faith to act in love and service that benefits the entire body and saints within it. As we are unified, the goal of the Lord's ministries isn't only to encourage strong persevering faith, but also to stir each other up to love and good works [Hebrews 10:24, 25]:

"²⁴and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; all the more as you see the day drawing near."

An energized church will exhibit this contagious, love-spreading attitude in every new ministry and service that is undertaken, with all faith that is in Jesus Christ, knowing that He binds His children to Himself and makes it possible. When we understand that we become stronger only through our personal and corporate bonding with Him, tending to the needs of others, bearing each other's burdens, forgiving one another, do we become more useful to Him as a truly unified church body. Unlike Laodicea, we cannot forget what He has done to unite Himself with us; we must not disconnect ourselves from our faith and the sound doctrine that is its foundation. Any breach of unity, or by taking unity for granted, creates stress, division, despair, and conflict in the church. Forsaking our unity, which provides the power and energy to pursue God's call for our church body, can stall any spiritual momentum we have. Taking for granted the exclusivity we enjoy being one with Jesus Christ manifests as 'lukewarmness'- a church that is simply going through the motions, with no aim or purpose of serving others or Jesus Christ. Such a church cannot grow spiritually, as it does not fully rely on the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Through this unity, then, we become complete in a unified cause- this is the aim of the Lord's ministry, which is to build up and edify the church and cause it to grow in the kind of spiritual maturity that reflects Jesus Christ. As the body of Christ we are to attain a corporate personality of Christ-likeness, energized in the unity of knowledge of the Son of God. Opinions will always divide, but doctrine will always unite believers. The energized church is to produce spiritual leaders that share the same rare trait: the burning, unselfish desire to see everyone

else around them become better Christians; by their example, and undeniably at their own expense. This kind of leadership has unity at its core and is God inspired. True leaders in the energized church realize that success occurs only when the undertaking and achievement of God's will supersedes their own goals. The objective of the best leaders, therefore, is to train and equip worthy replacements for themselves, living and acting by Godly example such that their charge will be left in capable hands. We should be spiritual leaders that instill this confidence and comfort! All in the church body should be able to witness that the church leadership's primary concern is the welfare of the church family and our relationship with God and each other is the highest merit. Harmony and peace within the church body is only possible when it is built upon the foundation of sound doctrine [Romans 15:4-7]:

"⁴For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ⁵Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; ⁶that with one accord you may may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God."

Spiritual maturity is not evidenced in the tolerance or acceptance of sin- just the opposite- we are to recognize our own sin, repent, and change to reflect Christ-likeness. In a similar manner, as we

identify disobedience and sin in the church body (other believers), we are to bear their burdens, encouraging them to edification through the act unburdening themselves to Jesus Christ. All must come to the throne of forgiveness; as a corporate body of believers, we must not judge and thereby hinder those that seek forgiveness and restoration to Christ; we must compassionately embrace those who are struggling, encouraging them with the confident hope and strength that can only be attained through Him.

RECHARGE (SUMMARY)

Partial obedience to the call of Jesus Christ and His ministry is the same as no obedience. Jesus cannot use or equip a person for ministry who exercises a conditional, compromised affirmation of faith.

Likewise, God can remove the usefulness of the church unless there is confession and repentance of sin, and acknowledgement of the unity of faith. We cannot disconnect, at any time, ourselves from our faith and the sound doctrine which is its foundation.

The aim of Christ's unity for His church's ministry is to build up and edify believers and cause the church to grow in spiritual maturity that reflects Christ-likeness. True and effective spiritual leadership places the relationship between God and the church body as the highest priority.

When the body does the work of the ministry, the goal isn't only to encourage strong persevering faith, but also to stir each other up to love and good works. We are to assess and bear the burdens of our brothers and sisters, not by judging but by forgiveness and encouraging restoration (reunion) with Jesus Christ.

BOOST (DEEPER STUDY)

Unity:

1 Corinthians 2:6-16
1 Corinthians 12:12-14
Romans 14:1-12

Spiritual Leadership and Edification:

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
Galatians 6:1-10

Lukewarmness/ Backsliding:

Deuteronomy 4:9, 23-31
Matthew 8:38
2 Peter 2:20-22
Hebrews 10:26-39

POWER ON

“Dealing With Deceit”
Ephesians 4:14

“¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”

All Christian servants and followers of God’s Word, while called to encourage and exhort fellow believers, are subjected to the unrelenting attack of Satan. Paul’s writings to the church at Ephesus are a reminder of the pursuit of the Lord’s strength and confidence necessary to carry on His work, as well as an advance warning of the powers of darkness (false doctrine and false teachers) that will attempt to undermine it. False teachers and deceivers (within the church and external to the church) put an emphasis on what is being done, but in doing so, forget the source (Jesus Christ) that provided the opportunity to serve, and ultimately who they are doing it for. False teachers preach a doctrine of self-help, victories won by personal strength, expansive intelligence, and ultra-positive attitudes that ‘win’ a person success. Jesus Christ is completely understanding and knowledgeable of our human frailty, weakness, and our succumbing to sin. He created us! However, through deceitful teaching we can gain false security in the sense that we all think that we are better than we really are. We begin to live our lives searching for a sort of power and energy that is ultimately self-serving and has absolutely nothing to do with a relationship with Jesus Christ. We battle daily against those that

distort, deny, and exchange the Truth for a lie; a lie that claims that we are self-sufficient and we don't need Jesus.

God sets His contract with us; we are commanded by Him and Him alone to follow His Word. There can be no split allegiance between Him and the world. God responds to the doubtful and gives the mandate of worshipping in spirit and truth in the scriptural example of the woman at the well [John 4:23-24]:

"²³But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Deceivers want to put the emphasis on the outward and thus miss the core foundational truth of our weakness and God's grace. Worshipping God in spirit and truth requires that we must live our lives under God's authority and power, not our own, or by any other person. We cannot live on our own strength. We must stand on the Word of God. This is our exclusivity in Jesus Christ, and it is our first line of defense against deceivers.

In 2 John 7-10, the caution concerning false teachers is given. There is advance warning as to being tricked or fooled into influence by them; indeed, these proponents of Satan can be easily overlooked. They are cunning and crafty to the extent that they will appear harmless, camouflaged by their words and deeds in such a way that they sway the unprepared, immature believer:

“⁷For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. ⁹Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teachings of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting.”

Spiritually immature believers who are not properly grounded in the knowledge of Jesus Christ through God’s Word are inclined to uncritically accept every sort of beguiling doctrinal error and fallacious interpretation of Scripture preached by deceitful, false teachers in the church (John MacArthur). Thus, the focus for the energized church must be to not only to know what the bible says, and to study it, but we must also be vigilant to walk in it. Every day of our lives should be submitted to the power of the Holy Spirit and the authority of Jesus Christ as Lord, and to the Scriptures as His Word to us. The energized church must “walk the talk”, so as to reveal to those who would doubt or forsake His Word the living, active Truth that abides in us. If we do not practice what we preach in the whole Truth of Scripture, we become then liars, hypocrites, and distorters of the Word of God, unable to provide testimony of our faith to which Jesus Christ is the author and finisher. Our testimonies become hollow and meaningless. Such behavior does not please God and ultimately separates us

from Him [1 Corinthians 6:9-11]:

"⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God."

All Christians must be wary of being corrupted by association with evil; the energized church must flee the influences of erroneous teaching and worldly unrighteousness. We must strive, through the power of Jesus Christ, to free our lives of habitual sin [1 John 3:6-11]. Habitual activity reveals our character, so it is important that we take on the characteristics (be imitators) of Jesus Christ, Who sacrificially gave Himself so that we all could be living examples of Him here on earth. God sets our standard high, because He Himself is the highest standard. Worldly political philosophy and humanistic narcissism, as promoted by false teachers today, lowers our moral and spiritual standards to a mode of ineffectiveness and uselessness to ever be used by God. Without walking in the virtue and knowledge of God's Truth, we become gradually tolerant of sin and unrighteousness which robs us of any joy to live a life that is worthy of serving, worshipping, and glorifying an Almighty and Holy God. When we do not intend to obey, or choose not to obey God's commandments because of the fall to deception, false teaching, and evil influence, we will stunt the

growth of His church, and a spiritual darkness will be evidenced in our hearts. We can have deliverance from evil, and stem the tide of darkness and deception by understanding that Jesus Christ is the Sovereign King, and that our new nature of righteousness declared by the blood of Christ always trumps our sin nature. The believer who is rightly related to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is delivered. Our natural habitat as believers is to dwell in the Holy Spirit, not the conflict of our sin nature. We are not the masters of ourselves. We cannot remain captive in our wretchedness if we surrender fully to the will of the Holy Spirit. A disciple of Christ's energy and power is the Holy Spirit! Thus- no condemnation- believers are free from sin and death! No deceiver can ever claim the same victory as a believer can.

RECHARGE (SUMMARY)

We must recognize that worshipping God in spirit and truth, and living under God's authority and power, is our first line of defense against deceivers. We cannot live in our own strength and must surrender to the Holy Spirit to have victory.

The energized church must be aware that not only have a great number of deceivers and false teachers already gone out into the world, but they also have a strategy to cast doubt on, to deny, and to distort God's Truth.

The energized church must understand why it is so important to walk in spirit and truth. Every day of our lives should be submitted to the power of the Holy Spirit and authority of Jesus Christ. Our habitual activity as followers of Jesus Christ is a reflection of our submission to the power of the Holy Spirit. We can't live like the devil, and go with God!

SURGE (APPLICATION)

What kind of witness are we to those around us? Read Acts 5:1-11. By this illustration, what do you find to be the basic, defining characteristics of deception?

In today's world, many things compete against God for our devotion. The Hebrews of Old Testament times had lapsed into pagan worship of statues, animals, and other objects. False teachers use can use methods that can influence others toward denial of God's Word and unrighteousness. Read 1 Timothy 6:3-5. Name several things that can result from the strife of modern-day idolatry and the advocating of false doctrine.

BOOST (DEEPER STUDY)

False Doctrine/Deception /Heresy:

1 Timothy 1:3-11
Luke 12:51, 52
Jeremiah 14:15,16
Jude 4-16

Emancipated Living:

Romans 8:1-11
Galatians 5:16-26
Ephesians 4:17-32

POWER ON

“Intolerant of Sin, Loving of Sinners”
Ephesians 4:15

“¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.”

The energized church must be intolerant of sin, but love the sinner. We are all subject to the temptation and descent into a sinful life and disobedience to Jesus Christ, but as the Father saves us, we are born again and renewed by Him and are free from sin, and we are slaves to His righteousness and NOT sin. As we are free to confess and repent, so we are washed clean by His blood and the redemption He provided by His sacrifice on the cross. God spoke through Jeremiah the prophet, warning Israel about the tolerance of sin [Jeremiah 34:17]:

“¹⁷Therefore says the Lord, ‘You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming release each man to his brother, and each man to his neighbor. Behold, I am claiming a release to you,’ declares the Lord, ‘to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.’”

Jeremiah’s stark prophecy soon came to pass; the Israelites fell into Babylonian captivity some 600 years before the birth of Christ. This was God’s retribution for tolerance to disobedient behavior among His chosen people (the Israelites). This situation is similar to where the de-energized church finds itself today. If we look objectively at our culture today, we are held captive by the influ-

ence of worldly evil in the forms of political correctness (doing what man feels right to do, or believe he is correct to do, versus what Scripture commands him to do), social trends and media entertainment which dilutes and distorts Biblical moral values by presentations engrossed in displays of violence and pornography. We are bombarded with the influences of cheap, quick gratification and temporary satisfaction, which serves no one else but ourselves. We soon become callous and uncaring of the welfare of anyone except ourselves. This form of narcissism can damage souls, draining the spirit of a servant of Jesus Christ into an apathetic, unforgiving, unrepentant, and rebellious person. This person refuses to change himself or herself to be more like Christ. Those who are tolerant of the world view and of the wickedness of sin walk around in a half-dead condition, neither committed to Jesus Christ or to any one they claim to have a loving, caring relationship with- in short, they only care about themselves.

The problem is that we won't change, or choose to change, what we are unwilling to confront. We know as believers that sin is wrong, yet we choose to step aside, look the other way, or stay uninvolved in the swelling of sinfulness in the modern world, in our churches, in a sinning brother, or more succinctly, ourselves. We must fight and repel the deception of heresy with the integrity of the gospel [Galatians 6:1-5]:

1Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of

Christ. ³For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to one another. ⁵For each one shall bear his own load.

We must speak the truth in love, that is, correction and exhortation that is accomplished by a spiritually mature believer who has studied scripture and is equipped in sound doctrine. Without a grounded knowledge in sound doctrine and spiritual maturity, exhortation of another brother or sister in Christ will amount to little more than sentimentality; a sort of half-hearted compassion that neither convicts nor consoles. We must adhere to the Word of God, rather than finding loopholes or excuses for our sinful behavior and the sinful behavior of other believers. True repentance is fulfilled when one confronts the sin, and the confrontation invokes *change*. It must include the denial of self. It is an admission and agreement with God that the sin has been *personally* committed against Him, it must include the *full* emptying of one self to the grace of God. This is the manifestation of repentance and forgiveness as only one grounded in sound doctrine can receive from Jesus Christ. From 1 Thessalonians 2:13, the Word of God is what performs the work and energizes believers to acts of love, helping them to become disciples, and enabling the discipling of others:

¹³And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in

you who believe.

The truth of the Word of God contradicts any sense of relativism. Relativism promotes that truth is "in the eye of the beholder"...in other words, what's good for me is relative to me, and what's good for you is relative to you. Relativism is bred from narcissism described above, and is antithetical to the bible. It is a presupposition that common sense, logic, and experiential conditions predicate what a person believes to be true. This person who lives his life as if there is nothing true beyond the physicality of the earth (what they can see, what they can feel emotionally and experience socially), does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, as they do not fit his definition of logic and sense [1 Corinthians 2:14]:

¹⁴But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

In contrast to this, the apostle Paul says the believer in Christ has received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God [1 Corinthian 2:12-13]:

¹²Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, ¹³which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

Energized Christians are compelled by the love of Christ, in the exhortation of other believers. The love of Christ is the sacrificial love of for all; because believers know this, we no longer live for self, but live for Jesus Christ. Because of our exclusivity with Christ, we cannot view anyone in an un-Christlike manner. We no longer see things, think, or live like we once did prior to accepting the Lord as our personal Savior. We are new creations [2 Corinthians 5:14-21]. We are reconciled with Christ, and our ministry with other believers is the reconciliation of them to Jesus. We are not to hold sin against anyone. We must realize that we ourselves are forgiven by God, and acknowledge that we don't deserve forgiveness in our sinful state; this becomes our spiritual motivation to forgive others!

Christ builds His church according to His great plan for us. See Acts 2:42. Christ is the Head and calls all believers to act, change, and become more like Him. The energized church produces disciples that are completely yielded and obedient to the Lord's will, subject to His controlling power and Christ-like in all areas of their life. Those who are outside the church, ie, do not choose to fall under the authority of God's Headship, and subsequently the leadership of the church, cannot claim the love or salvation that is Jesus Christ, because it is impossible to love Christ and despise His body [Hebrews 10:24-31]:

²⁴And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; all the more as you see the day drawing near.

²⁶For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a certain terrifying expectation of judgement, and the fury of fire which will consume the adversaries. ²⁸Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" And again, "The Lord will judge His people." ³¹It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The price of abandonment of Jesus Christ and His church is very high. We must be energized to work together in the church body; forsaking our past sin and moving forward in our striving toward Christ-likeness. We must forgive *and forget*. We must put away previous self-righteousness, disregarding external virtue, and put our energy in pursuing Jesus Christ. We need to leave our past, and encourage other believers to leave their past behind. God has provided a way out – Grace! All believers can live guilt-free. Grace can recover all that sin has destroyed. Looking ahead to the pursuit of Christ-likeness and forsaking your sinful past is essential. We need to understand the essence of the forgiveness of Jesus Christ...it is complete, and it is liberating. Christians must not waste time analyzing the predicaments of any wrongdoing to them; bitterness must not be allowed to consume us. [Philippians 3:13].

Our victory as an energized church will not come through resolution, but by the realization and reception of God's amazing grace. The energized church cannot gain momentum moving toward tomorrow if we drag yesterday's sin behind us. God never consults our past to determine our potential. Thus, we must relinquish our hardness of hearts to forgive others, be forgiven, and leave the sin behind us, moving ever closer to Jesus Christ.

RECHARGE (SUMMARY)

Tolerance of sin amongst believers does not come without severe penalty. God does not condone a rebellious spirit, unrepentant heart, or willing adherence to worldly precepts over the truth of His Word. His Word must not be overridden or disregarded in favor of human political correctness, narcissism, or relativism.

The energized church must repel the deception of heresy with the integrity of the gospel. We must be willing to change as we confront our own sin for what it is- a personal rebellion against Jesus Christ. We must be personally committed to repent of our sin, fully emptying ourselves to the grace of God. We must also forgive others such that they can be restored to Jesus Christ in like manner, not by being judgmental or critical, but by bearing one another's burdens.

Spiritually mature believers who are equipped in sound doctrine must accomplish exhortation within the church body with love and gentleness. The energized church must corporately and personally acknowledge the cost of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, in order to properly convict and console other believers.

As an energized church we must understand the depth and breadth of Christ's forgiveness and grace. This same spirit of forgiveness must be evident in us as we forgive and forget the sin, which can divide relationships within the church body, and ultimately separate us and Jesus Christ.

BOOST (DEEPER STUDY)

Discipline:

1 Corinthians 5:1-5
1 Timothy 5:1-2, 19-20
2 Corinthians 2:6-8
Proverbs 16:1-5

Bitterness:

Ephesians 4:31-32
Matthew 6:14-15
Proverbs 15:1

Forgiveness:

Proverbs 24:17, 29
Romans 12:14-21
Matthew 18:21-22









