

In Vain They Do Worship – Chapter 2

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Ch 2: The Doctrine of Jesus Christ · By Willis Young

September 15, 2010

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CHAPTER 2: The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

In the New Testament we read not only of several doctrines but also of several types of doctrine. There is, for example, the doctrine of the Pharisees. We have the doctrine of God our Saviour, the doctrine of Jesus Christ, the Apostles' doctrine, and the doctrine of Baptism. To add to the confusion we note that the Apostle Paul referred to "my doctrine"—the expression which has given rise over the years to the term "Pauline Doctrine." We read, too, of good doctrine, sound doctrine, new doctrine, and strange doctrine. And Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees that they were guilty of teaching "for doctrine commandments of men."

Before I begin to outline what I believe is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, I would like to say that when reference is made to the scribes and Pharisees, there is no indication that they were the heathen or "outsiders" as I was led to believe while growing up. They were, in fact, the very fundamental custodians of the Old Testament law, the very essence of the faith, as it were, and the very epitome of Jewish religious practices of that day. They were, in fact, to Jesus in his time what the "workers" were, and are, to the church in which I was raised.

I have chosen ten aspects of Christ's philosophy which, I feel, sum up his entire doctrine. I chose these points also because I believe they will help you better understand why I became disillusioned with the form of worship that I was part of. I am sure that you can, as well as I was able to at last, recognize the contradictions, the pretenses of love, the many forms of deception, the spirit of accusation, and the overall sham which runs rampant through the system. When I could no longer cope with the abject hypocrisy around me and within my very own being, I broke with the faith, and it is only now, after more than twenty years, that I can even somewhat objectively scrutinize it and examine it for what it really is.

"JUDGE NOT THAT YE BE NOT JUDGED."

Surely these words must express the first element in the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Read them again, and think about them. Aren't they filled with comfort and reassurance? There is not the slightest hint of harshness; rather, there is every indication of fair play and assumption of innocence. But that's not the way it worked in my group. I stood by and watched innocent people being convicted, tried and judged by harsh, unfeeling leaders who were mean-spirited, self-serving, and completely out of touch with reality, and I knew that one day, if I dared to go to bat for the underdogs, my turn would come.

And did it!

It's strange, you know, how people will judge you without ever giving you the benefit of a trial. And do you know what else I discovered? The meanness, the lies, the implications, and the allegations of wrong-doing—all things that should have been feared from the "worldly" faction outside the circle—were all coming from the so called God-fearing brethren among whom I worshipped and with whom I thought I was in fellowship. There is hardly anything more destructive to your soul and spirit than to be told by a "brother" that you are being accused of all sorts of awful things but that he can neither tell you what is being said or who is saying them. It's rather hard for you to go to "meeting" the next Sunday morning wondering who around you has been spreading these tales and, indeed, not having a clue about what these tales are. I solved the problem for myself by not going back to church again, but that certainly didn't do anything about changing attitudes and contradictions that still exist within the circle. *Incredibly, after more than fifteen years' absence, I have never once been approached by any church member—worker or "friend"—to inquire about why I left, and I have never been invited back.*

**“THEY THAT BE WHOLE NEED NOT A PHYSICIAN
BUT THEY THAT ARE SICK.”**

I grew up believing that these words were the reason behind our prayers that the Lord of the harvest would send forth labourers into his vineyard. After all, how else could all those sinners in Brazil or Ghana or France or Grenville, Quebec be reached and saved? I grew up believing that the workers were spiritual paramedics, that the world was their mission field, and that each lost and sinful soul was their mission. I grew up believing that the workers were our deliverers, our healers, our mentors, and our friends. I grew up believing that the workers cared what happened to us—to me—and that they had our best interests at heart. I grew up believing that surely I must count for something with the workers since I took the profession of my faith very seriously and did everything I could to respect and support them and to show them I was on their side in the great battle for life. I grew up believing that our home was a haven for the weary, homeless, footsore labourers who came there because they knew they were welcome and because they were “worthy of their hire.”

I believe I grew up believing.

But what I could not know or ever believe was that one day I would be ignored and ostracized, that I would be left wounded and literally dying on the battlefield while the emissaries of The Great Physician spent their time visiting and cavorting with those that were whole, or, more precisely, those who never questioned the loopholes or those who had bigger houses and more luxurious cars or those who went to greater pains to buy them their favourite brand of ice cream.

Those people were spiritually healthy, you see, because they bowed and scraped and catered to the hierarchy, and, let me tell you, they made someone like me look pretty sick! Oh, sure, I believed, all right. There was no question about that. *But what I was to find out rather quickly was that there was no help for my unbelief.*

I was soon to find out that the sick in India needed a physician, that spiritual healing was being directed to Korea and Japan because, after all, were not egos stroked when such sacrifices were made? There was honor, too, in casting out the nets in Ottawa and Los Angeles and Timmins and Tidehead, but there would be no recognition for coming over to my humble abode to try to find out what was eating away at me. “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.”

They that are sick need a physician, true enough, but whether you get help or not depends entirely on who you are and on what your attitude is considered to be. *I didn’t have the right connections, and I didn’t warrant a house call, and so I was left to die.*

Dying on the battlefield must, undeniably, be a dreadfully lonely experience, and, surely, the ordeal can only be eased slightly by the presence near the expiring soldier of a tenderhearted medic or some other friend to sympathize and care. *Spiritually, I died alone*, and I was told later by one of the workers, George Poole—a man whom I supported and admired for years and who found himself at my place neither happily nor voluntarily—that he had never had any intention of coming near me and that, *as far as he was concerned, I was on my own.*

To this day I cannot believe that that man is either a good ambassador for truth or that he is worthy of the position he holds, and the name he bears of being a preacher of the doctrine of Jesus Christ. It would seem to me that, had he taken his responsibilities seriously, he would have seen them as being twofold. First, setting aside any consideration of my personal spiritual illnesses and needs, he most certainly had a duty toward the church. If I were so unhealthy, and if I had such an adverse effect on others, then it was his responsibility to see that I was removed from contact with them—quarantined if necessary—to ensure the health and welfare of all. And second, if my soul were of any value at all, then I should have been visited with, talked at, listened to, and my concerns and problems should have been addressed. But he was remiss on both counts, *and I was left to die without the benefit of the best specialists the world had to offer.*

**“I AM NOT COME TO CALL THE RIGHTEOUS
BUT SINNERS TO REPENTANCE.”**

These words, just like those in the previous quotation, were spoken to the scribes and Pharisees when they were criticizing Jesus for his association with “the world.” You would think, wouldn’t you, that these very strict and very religious people whose lives were spent reading their scriptures and anticipating the coming Messiah would have known whom they were looking for and would have recognized him when he came and would have supported him in his efforts to expand the Kingdom of God. They did not, or could not, do that, of course, because they were operating behind blinders of years of tradition and were held bound and gagged by the letter of the law. What an offense this young upstart must have been to them! He dared to question their legends and beliefs; he dared to contradict their interpretations of the law; but, above all, he dared to tell them that love and goodwill were more important to God than were the traditions of the fathers.

I’m not quite sure when it dawned on me that I was being taught and held by tradition and intellect rather than by love and goodwill, but, whenever it was, let me tell you, it was the beginning of the end for me. You see, that’s when I began to ask questions and, finding no suitable answers, began to question the very foundations of my belief itself. At that point, no one seemed inclined to treat me with the wisdom of Gamaliel (Acts 5:34–39), and so I was condemned to die because I dared to doubt.

The act of asking questions obviously made me appear rebellious, and, if rebellious, I must, therefore, have been considered unrighteous. As I look back and examine the events and attitudes that turned my life around, that is the only conclusion I can come to in respect to the negative treatment I experienced at the hands of the brotherhood. Sadly, such an explanation proves rather

poignantly that the charity that motivated Jesus is not manifested in the lives of those who claim that he has called them to feed his lambs and feed his sheep.

I cannot figure out, though, why my unrighteousness was considered more unrighteous than the unrighteousness of worldly sinners all around the globe who were, and are, being wooed and sought by men and women who consider themselves called to preach the gospel. Why was I never worth the effort of being saved? Why was my soul of less value than those other people around the corner or down the street? Since it is obvious that I was considered a sinner, and since Jesus came to call the sinners, why was I so pointedly ignored? I wonder why that is still the case.

I say I wonder, but I really believe I know the reason. I think I was, and am, a threat in some way to those neo-Scribes and neo-Pharisees who have always been more concerned with keeping the outside of the cup clean than with filling the inside with love and care and mercy and the milk of human kindness. They were so occupied with stressing the traditions of dress codes and other restrictions which have been imposed on day-to-day living that they failed to see the vanity of their whole basis of worship.

And that situation and those attitudes and conditions continue to exist until the present moment.

We read that Jesus said of himself that his mission in the world was to preach to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to restore sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who were bruised. Too, we read that when he instructed his disciples in their work, he told them to heal the sick, to teach all nations, to baptize in his name, and to preach the gospel to every creature. It has been my experience in recent years that those who pretend to “follow in the Master’s footsteps” have become very selective in their teaching and preaching practices. If the sun is shining and the weather is good, there may be a sinner or two out in the country who needs some seeking, but he had better hurry up and get saved before those cold winter winds come along, for that’s when the town and city heathens get their chance at salvation. If you should be lost and looking for the right way in November or December, you might as well relax because you can’t possibly get help until after the workers have completed their circuit of Special Meetings. You won’t fare any better in May, June, or July, either, for all mission work ceases in favour of a lot of elaborate preparation for a whole series of conventions which seem to have their roots in Old Testament feast days rather than anywhere in the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

If we accept the notion that Jesus Christ came to call the sinners to repentance and that he directed his disciples in the ministry to do the same, then we must believe that he meant all sinners everywhere—exclusive of human whim; and that the work should not be confined to three months in the fall and four months in winter and spring.

**“FOR THE SON OF MAN IS COME TO SEEK AND SAVE
THAT WHICH IS LOST”**

These words conjure up the image of the shepherd whose one sheep wandered away from the flock, and, instead of coldly and calculatingly deciding that one sheep wasn’t worth very much anyway, that shepherd left the “ninety-and-nine” and went out looking for the stray.

And he didn’t give up until he found it.

Don’t you get a feeling of love in that parable? A feeling of caring? A feeling of kindness? Of compassion? Patience? And, perhaps more than all of those, do you get a feeling of complete commitment? Commitment to his work and to his master who hired him, but, more importantly, a commitment to the individual members of the flock entrusted to his keep? Don’t you get the sense of safety which surrounded those sheep? I do. And you know what else I notice? There is no accusation, no “I told you not to go there,” no “See what you get for disobeying,” no “It serves you right,” and no “Just stay there until you’re ready to find your own way back.” And that’s all because the Son of Man came to seek and save that which is lost.

Just think for a moment about the words, “. . . that which is lost.” There is no condition or qualifier attached to them. They do not imply that one is sought solely because one has remained lost from birth. There is no hint that one should not be sought if one wandered away from the flock in later life. There is universality in those words, a sense that there is an all-encompassing desire that every soul should be sought and brought to the safety of the fold.

When I was young and growing up at home, I was always led to believe that this “non-denomination” was based on love. I have to admit that it was not so much what I saw that led me to believe that, but rather it was what I heard being said. My grandparents told me about it, my parents told me about it, other relatives and friends in the “meetings” told me about it and talked about it, and I sat for hours year after year on hard benches in hot sunshine in a tent surrounded by hundreds of other believers listening to “workers” telling me about it from their little platform up at the front. And do you know what happened? I came to believe it myself.

But that shows you the power that brainwashing has in the process of indoctrination. I say that because the longer I continued, and the older I became, and the more I searched for that love and understanding, the less of them I found, and the more I began to realize that they were virtually non-existent. Mind you, I will not go so far as to say that they never existed or that they still don’t exist for a few chosen souls who seem to be able to curry all the favours with the powers that be, but what I do know is that they were not there for me – and they still are not.

**“A BRUISED REED SHALL HE NOT BREAK, AND SMOKING FLAX
SHALL HE NOT QUENCH.”**

I believe these words are the root and essence of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, and even though I grew up knowing them and quoting them, I shall never forget the moment in time when their meaning took on a very special significance for me. It was as if they suddenly

were no longer words. They became a tangible thing much more than the way a voice is a tangible thing. They became something I could feel and relate to, something that entered into my very being, and something that brought a physical release from a sense of self-imposed guilt, a release from many years of a burden which I could no longer bear, and a release from a whole way of life which had long since ceased to have any real meaning for me.

It was one of those very stormy nights toward the end of winter when everyone is telling you if you don't have go out driving, it would be very unwise of you to do so. The snow was falling in those large, heavy flakes that make streets and intersections treacherously slippery, and which form an almost impenetrable wall in front of your headlights. The sky had taken on that red glow which you often see created by the reflection of the city around you.

But I had no choice. I had to go out driving.

Earlier that day I had a visitor. It was not a surprise visit or anything like that for he had called me the day before and told me that someone had suggested to him that he should come to see me. I invited him for supper then, and he accepted. I was pretty sure I knew the purpose of his visit because, about two weeks previously, I had written two letters, each one informing a church elder that I could no longer live with the feelings of hypocrisy inside me and that I would not be coming back to church. Since my invited dinner guest was George Poole, one of the brother workers—the one, in fact, to whom I have already referred earlier in this chapter—I believed in my heart that he was finally going to sit down to talk with me and to see what it was that was causing me such great personal and spiritual distress.

It turned out that he had no such intention because, as he later explained, he really didn't care.

I had always rather liked the man and found his sense of humour to be refreshing. His preaching was always appropriate and to the point. I rarely, if ever, missed attending his gospel services when he was in the area and he often called on me to play the piano for the hymn singing. Some years earlier when he and his companion, Oscar Waterbury, were “pioneering” in French in Quebec City, I loaded up my car with four or five interested friends from Ottawa and, every long week-end for about two years, we would converge on them and help them to enjoy a little fellowship and diversion since they were surrounded by “outsiders” and did not have the benefit of regular contact with other “professing” folk.

I felt, therefore, that I knew him quite well, that I could talk to him fairly easily, and that our visit that night would go as well as could be expected under the circumstances. I can tell you now that I was totally unprepared for his attitude and demeanor and for the way our conversation evolved.

Right from the start he appeared happy and relieved that I had decided to withdraw from the group. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, he informed me that he was there not because he wanted to be but because he was told he should come. There seemed to have been nothing that I had ever done right in my life because there was not one positive point put forward, not one word of encouragement, not one hint of concern for my weakened faith, and, more than anything else, not one iota of regret that I had not been to church for a couple of weeks. He told me that families with little children would not want me around lest my attitude would contaminate them. He told me that, wherever he had travelled from Moncton to North Bay, he had heard nothing but negative reports about me. When I informed him that I knew no one personally in either of those centers, he merely grunted an almost inaudible, “Is that right?” Since the rest of the conversation and my change of attitude toward him have been previously discussed, there remains only to say that we plunged out into the storm, and I drove him to Cornelius Jaenen's, which was his “home” for the night.

He bid me adieu and left the car, and as I slowly and cautiously wended my way homeward, I found myself thinking, “A broken reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.” Had I met with Jesus Christ that night, or even with someone possessing his spirit of love and compassion, I would have felt healed and bound and rekindled, but I realized most keenly that, instead, I had been with someone whose sole purpose was to complete the job of breaking the bruised reed and to entirely extinguish the smoking flax.

So I smiled to myself through the tunnel of snowflakes and, for the first time in a long time, I felt free from guilt, for I knew that the “faith” that I had left behind after thirty-six years did not contain even the most basic elements of the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

“NEITHER DO I CONDEMN THEE. . .”

Immediately before Jesus uttered this statement, he asked two questions: “. . . where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?”

Immediately before he asked those questions, he gave an invitation: “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone . . .”

And immediately after the initial phrase above, he added a proviso: “. . . go and sin no more.”

For many years the real meaning of this story eluded me. Surely, I used to think, Jesus knew the law, and he would know full well that the Scribes and Pharisees were simply testing him and his knowledge of it. Why, I would wonder, would he so obviously walk into their trap by taking such a lenient attitude toward a crime that everyone knew was punishable by death. And then one day, after observing several instances of the types of judgement and justice (or lack thereof) meted out by some of the supreme powers within the church—or “older workers” as they are called—I finally understood why Jesus had handled that situation as he did.

Let us review the progression of events. The Scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery. They reminded him that the law stated that she should be stoned to death, and then they asked for his opinion. His initial reaction was to do nothing but write in the sand and then, and only after continued pressure from them, he invited the sinless among them to first cast a stone. One by one they all left until, at last, Jesus and the accused woman were standing alone face to face.

This really wasn't a new or radical form of justice that Jesus was introducing. The law, as stated in the seventeenth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy, outlined very clearly the procedure to be followed in convicting any man or any woman of any abominable act which was punishable by death. They were to be accused by at least two witnesses—one was not enough—and the accusing witnesses were to be the first ones to initiate the death penalty. In this way it was not possible for anyone to concoct any story before he was willing to come face to face with the one he was accusing. Jesus, therefore, was simply asking the Scribes and Pharisees to carry out that part of their own law when he said, "He that is without sin . . . let him first cast a stone . . ."

I have so often, as I'm sure you have, heard people, in reference to this story, say, ". . . let him cast the first stone. . ." In fact, I may have been guilty of misquoting it myself in the past. But you do see the difference, don't you? If you say it this way, you place the emphasis on the first stone rather than on the first person responsible for throwing it, and that's not the impression that either the law or Jesus wanted to leave.

It's a pity, really, that my accusers from Moncton to North Bay had not been reporting directly to Jesus or, at the very least, to someone who possessed his sense of wisdom and justice. Then, I would have had the benefit of even the most primitive of trials. How easy it was for them—whoever they were—to make allegations—whatever they were—about me knowing that they did not ever have to be identified or to come forward to cast that first fatal stone. How comfortable it is to be able to remain anonymous and have someone else do your dirty work! And how contrary it is to the doctrine of Jesus Christ!

You have heard me refer a couple of times to "my weakened faith" or to "my unbelief." I would like to explain at this point that that was not how I felt about myself or how I judged my situation. You will also recall that I told you I watched innocent people being falsely accused and spiritually destroyed, and, when I spoke up in their defense, I became branded with them and accused of the same "crime" of contending that more emphasis should be placed on love and on caring and even on human friendship than on the outward trappings to which I have already alluded and to which I will devote a more detailed account later on.

Thus my concern for others and my boldness, as the Apostle Paul put it, to speak about the gospel of God with much contention, gave me and others the reputation that we were, at the very best, weak in the faith, and, at the very worst, complete unbelievers. Do you remember the story of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, disagreeing over a point of doctrine concerning the law and its application to Christianity? Not for a moment did Paul consider himself weak in the faith or suffering from unbelief when he wrote that he "withstood Peter to the face for he was to be blamed." In fact, what should be learned here is that there is room for contention, for disagreement, for questions, and for concern that the doctrine of Jesus Christ is being clouded by personalities, traditions, and regional disparities.

And then there are the ax-men! These are the workers with little or no intestinal fortitude who, like my visitor that stormy night, have nothing better to do than to cater to, and carry out, the whims and orders of the top echelon in the hierarchical scheme of things. They are quite literally the throwers of the first stones. Those who should be the "first to throw" have come in all their pomp and dignity, preached to the nodding, weeping throngs, passed their judgements on the "weak in the faith," and have whisked themselves off to other "areas of concern" knowing that their dirty work will all be done by the lackeys they left behind.

They have the gift of prophesy, and they speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but, because charity is so obviously and sadly lacking, they have become nothing more than sounding brasses and tinkling cymbals. They have their following, their admirers, and their adherents, but are we not cautioned that when the blind lead the blind, they both fall into the ditch?

"Neither do I condemn thee," Jesus said. "Go and sin no more." Neither he nor the law which he came to fulfill imparted the right to accuse or condemn anyone without proof—or to accuse and condemn and then delegate to anyone else the responsibility of carrying out the death penalty. "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous. . ."

***"...A CERTAIN SAMARITAN...HAD COMPASSION ON HIM, AND
BOUNDUP HIS WOUNDS...AND TOOK CARE OF HIM."***

This is an excerpt from the parable, which Jesus spoke directly to a certain Pharisee lawyer who was tempting him concerning the law. I have never read the story without being filled with two very strong and opposite emotions. There is first a feeling of disgust at the thought of the priest and the Levite, both examples of the religious pillars of the church, being so uncaring and detached, and, second; there is a deep love and appreciation for the Samaritan who dared to become involved. And there's a tremendous sense of sympathy and sorrow for the suffering and misfortune of others implied in certain expressions: he had compassion on him; he went to him; he bound up his wounds; he poured in oil and wine; he set him on his own beast; he took him to an inn; he took care of him; he paid for his keep at the inn; and he offered to come back and to keep in touch. It isn't any wonder that Jesus related these words in response to the question: "Who is my neighbour?"

I thought for years that my neighbour was the person living across the street or in the house or apartment next door. I suppose that was why I was always confused when I would read that I had to "love [my] neighbour as [myself]." Invariably, I did not know who lived across the street or next door, or, certainly, I didn't know them well enough to love them as myself. Oh, yes, of course, I would have helped them and done anything I could do for them at any time, but I felt there must be more to this neighbour business than I was aware of. One day I decided to look into the dictionary for the meaning of the word.

And I read that one's neighbour is one's fellow human being.

"Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was [fellow human being] unto him that fell among thieves?"

"He that had mercy on him was his [fellow human being]."

"Thou shalt love thy [fellow human being] as thyself."

"Love worketh no ill to his [fellow human being]."

"Who is my [fellow human being]?"

Can you believe that it is possible to be a member of a church for more than three decades— to grow up in it, really—and still not be considered a fellow human being? Can you stretch your imagination even farther? For over twenty years I was part of the same congregation in the same city and, for most of those twenty years, I attended meetings twice a week in the same home, and I was never considered by the majority of the group as a fellow human being. For many years I laboured under the impression that I was, and I suppose I'll never really know whether that impression came from deception or self-deception. If it was deception, it was nothing more and nothing less than the complete package of dishonesty and lack of truth that I eventually came to recognize, and if it was self-deception, it was only because I wanted so much to believe, to belong, and to serve, and because I had been indoctrinated from such an early age to think that everyone within the church everywhere was automatically a fellow human being to everyone else. It came as a great shock, let me tell you, to realize that my best friends and my fellow human beings were just plain folk I knew outside the church—folks who, I'd been programmed to believe, were worldly sinners with no hope of salvation unless they accepted the teachings of the church that rejected and turned its back on me.

How do I know, you may well ask, that I was not treated as a fellow human being? It's a little hard to explain because attitudes are subtle, elusive things. They're hard to define, hard to identify, and hard to point a finger at. I know this because, as a teacher, I have had to deal with attitudes for many years. But one day I woke up and realized that I never saw those people I went to church with except when I was at church. It dawned on me that they never once called me up to tell me that they would like to come to see me or that they would like me to go to see them. I started to think back, and I could not remember the last time they had asked me to do a good turn for them, and I knew for sure that when I needed a favour done, not one name among them came to mind to ask. I thought of the many times I had offered to help where help was needed, but my overtures of friendship were always ignored. I wondered what I'd done and where I'd gone wrong, but my questions served only to exacerbate the situation, and I was treated with even more disdain. Yes, attitudes are subtle, but eventually I did catch on, and I turned around, and I walked away.

And if anyone noticed, I wouldn't know because no one ever told me that he cared.

The priest and the Levite, you see, passed by on the other side.

They didn't care.

Their church, after all, was based on tradition and law, and on many volumes of interpretations of that law, and they did not necessarily have to embrace the principles of compassion and mercy, which were two of the basic elements in the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

"FOR MY YOKE IS EASY AND MY BURDEN IS LIGHT"

This shows the straightforward and uncomplicated nature of the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Easily, it could be another way of saying "I will have mercy and not sacrifice," or, even, "Love thy neighbour as thyself." It isn't any wonder, really, that such a simple philosophy would be a major stumbling block to a group of people who were steeped in a way of life whose very existence depended entirely on laws, legalities, legalism, and litigation.

The only difference between the "church" of the Scribes and Pharisees or the Sadducees and the one in which I grew up was the nature of things that were regulated or controlled.

When we turn back the pages of the Bible to the Old Testament, it doesn't take very long before we get bogged down with the weight of rules and ordinances with which those "chosen" people had to live. Even the most perfunctory of scans reveals laws concerning food and clothing, laws concerning cleansing for sin, laws concerning leprosy, laws concerning a woman's menstruation period, laws concerning planting and harvesting, laws concerning marriage and sexual practices, laws concerning feast days and holy days, and laws governing sacrifices and offerings. As well, there are the "Ten Commandments" covering just about every moral and ethical aspect of everyday life, and, just to be on the safe side, there is a whole section devoted to "divers laws and ordinances." Jesus was really quite serious when he said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me,. . . for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

". . . my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." I grew up hearing these words quoted and being preached about, but it would be many years before I would come to realize the contradiction that existed between word and deed. In fact, as I look back now, I really wonder what I ever thought they meant because it certainly was neither easy nor light to live with the onerous restrictions that controlled my every thought and movement every day of my life. It's true that there were no rules for cleansing leprosy, or for sowing and reaping, or, for that matter, for the menstrual period, but heavy emphasis was placed on all types of clothing and outward appearances, as well as on entertainment and marriage practices. As long as you wore the right thing, drank the right thing, went to the right places, and married the right people, you could gossip all you wanted to, accuse anybody of almost anything imaginable, stab in the back anybody you felt needed stabbing, and tell everyone you met that you were in the right way. I suppose in a strange contradictory sort of way the yoke was easy and the burden light because no one ever told you that you had to love anyone, or to respect anyone, or to help anyone out when he was down and out or in trouble, and all anyone cared about, pretty much, was how long your hair was and whether you had shaved the day before.

I remember being told, and telling others, that there were no ordinances controlling me or anyone else and that everyone did all those good things because they just loved to do them, and they kept away from all those bad places because they just wouldn't be caught dead there anyway, but somewhere along the line I recognized the lie in that testimony, and I began to realize that motives for doing

good and abstaining from evil were not founded on the pure and simplistic terms which I'd been convinced existed from within. We were, all of us, led around by our noses. We were not only ruled but we were also overruled in anything we would do or say or ask that was the least bit at odds with the tradition of the church or the position of the workers. Anything that was new or different or anybody who dared to express an original thought was an immediate threat to somebody's authority.

Anyone who posed such a threat became categorized as a troublemaker or a rebel or a heretic, and, if those terms were too vague to invoke excommunication, one could be accused of sinful sexual practices—perverted or otherwise—or (and this is the big one) of drinking.

To this day the authority of the self-elected overseers and the power that permeates down through the layers of command within the ranks are maintained by coercion and intimidation. And it would not be too far off base to say that people are held and controlled by the abject fear of being demoted or kicked out entirely.

"... my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

"INASMUCH AS YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE MY BRETHREN, YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ME."

These words certainly remove any semblance of patronage from the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

"When did we see you hungry?" people will ask. "When did we feed you?"

"When were you thirsty, and when did we give you something to drink?"

"When were you naked, and when did we clothe you?"

"When were you sick? When were you in prison? When did we visit you?"

"When were you a stranger, and when did we take you in?"

"When you did it to one of the least of these my brethren." That's when.

We know that Jesus spoke these words allegorically in reference to a final judgement, but they have very strong implications concerning the way human beings should treat each other whether they consider themselves Christians or not. But if they do consider themselves Christians, then the words take on a very special spiritual significance indeed.

"... to one of the least ..." What honour is there in that? "... the least ..." That could mean that nobody knows him. It could mean that if we help him, nobody would notice us. It could mean that he might not be able to ever help us in return. It means doing unto others what we would have others do unto us. It means that "all the world's a stage" and that we should take seriously our role as a member of the human race, going outside and beyond ourselves to do what needs to be done for whom and when it needs doing. "What needs doing" can have both natural and spiritual implications, and it should not be restricted exclusively to a member in good standing of the church to which we belong.

The good people in the church I attended for so many years did not consider me even as high on the scale as "the least."

"For I was an hungered ..." In fact I was starving. I craved fellowship. I wanted the workers to visit me, to drive my car, to spend time in my home, to partake of my food, and to make me feel useful. I wanted to feel that I counted for something. Frankly, I wanted a little spiritual attention, "... and [they] gave me no meat."

And I starved to death.

"I was thirsty ..." Parched, really. I looked on as others drank from the fountain of favouritism and the trough of patronage, and my throat ached for even a drop of that water of understanding and care, "... and [they] gave me no drink."

And I died of thirst.

"I was a stranger ..." That really was not the case, as you already know, for in my whole lifetime I embraced no other form of worship, and, for almost forty years, I was very personally involved, but I had become a stranger to the idea of rules and laws and traditions which had no spiritual or Biblical foundations. I was considered a stranger by those who had neither the knowledge nor the ability with which to "give a reason of the hope that [was] in [them] in meekness and fear." I was a stranger to the concept that God was so small that he would be more concerned with the outward signs of piety and holiness than with the circumcision of the heart and spirit. I became a stranger to the mindless, raving fanatics who set themselves up as demagogues in order to promote their own doctrine and further their own ends. "... and [they] took me not in."

And I perished in loneliness.

"Naked ..." I was stripped of my dignity and my self-esteem. Because I expressed doubts about the validity of certain aspects of the faith and questioned some decisions that had been made concerning the treatment of some other people who had similar misgivings, I was deemed no longer worthy of even an apron of fig leaves. Instead of being covered with care and consideration for my concern, I was belittled and degraded and humiliated. "... and [they] clothed me not. ..."

And I froze to death.

"I was in prison. ..." I'm not sure when I was first put in, and I don't even know how long I was there before I got myself out, but I do know that I had no trial, no jury, and no defense council. It would seem, however, that I was subjected to some pretty harsh criticism and judgement by some pretty elusive and severe judges, for everywhere I went, I was treated as the hardened criminal I was deemed to be. No effort was ever made to rehabilitate me, "... and [they] came not unto me."

And I escaped and was left to wander on my own.

"I was sick . . ." Yes, sick of the corruption which had permeated the system, sick of the hypocrisy in the ministry, sick of the traditions which were being touted as doctrine, sick of the treatment received by everyone who sought reassurance that things were being done according to scripture, and sick of the glaring loopholes that were ignored or glossed over by arrogant, self-appointed overseers and witch-hunters. ". . . and [they] visited me not."

And I sought and found friendship and fellowship elsewhere.

"Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." To one of the least. Just one .I was such a one, and they did nothing for me. I am one yet, and they still do nothing for me. For people who believe in a resurrection, and a hereafter, and a system of eternal punishment and reward, I find such callous behavior both contradictory and uncharacteristic. I wonder what excuse they think they will give "at the last judgment" to the one whose name they constantly echo and in whom they profess to implicitly believe.

We didn't have anything to do with him, Lord, because we heard he was just a sinner anyway.

Well, you see, Lord, he was sick, and we didn't feel like going near him.

Sure, we saw him there, Lord, but he was only a smoking flax, and we had more important things to do and far more famous people to attend to.

Whom do you mean, Lord? Oh, we figured he was just a bruised reed, and we never gave him a second glance.

Lord, are you saying that we should have taken an interest in him?

Oh! Lord, if we'd only known that's what you meant!

" . . . and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divide his sheep from the goats . . ."

**BUT WHEN HE WAS YET A GREAT WAY OFF, HIS FATHER
SAW HIM, AND HAD COMPASSION, AND RAN, AND FELL ON HIS NECK,
AND KISSED HIM.**

I believe this parable of the Prodigal Son emphasizes as does no other that the doctrine of Jesus Christ makes no provision for pride or spite, for jealousy or selfishness, for ill will or intolerance, or for unforgiveness. On the other hand, however, we see boundless charity, unqualified love, and a sense of unsuppressed feelings of joy and happiness.

Pride has both a good and bad connotation, and no one would deny that it is quite acceptable to possess a sense of dignified self-respect. What is not good, however, and what there is no room for in the doctrine of Jesus Christ, is too high an opinion of one's own importance or superiority. Such a sense would have prevented the Prodigal Son from ever admitting that he was less than thrilled to be feeding pigs in "that distant land of famine." Can you imagine how he would have felt if, after realizing his situation and conquering his pride, his father had closed the door on him and told him that it served him right? But obviously his father didn't believe in spite. Instead, according to the parable, when he saw his son "a great way off," he ran to meet him. Charity and compassion took precedence over the natural instincts of ill will and unforgiveness, and the son was treated with a spirit of warmth and well being.

My own experience was entirely different.

I left the fold when I could no longer tolerate that sense of pride and those feelings of superiority, self-indulgence, and self-importance that had begun to dominate and control the ministry. I did not have the feeling that for me there was any bread at all, let alone "enough and to spare," and, as I have already pointed out, I was deliberately left to "perish with hunger" by those who were appointed to feed and nourish the flock.

I certainly experienced the selfishness and intolerance expressed in the parable by "the elder brother." Although I'd never contemplated "taking [my] journey into a far country," it seemed to me that, every time I moved or turned around, I was faced with blame and anger, and, what was even more destructive to me, with indifference. It is a most peculiar contradiction that, after I did take my leave and withdrew from the so-called "Way of God" I felt at peace with myself and with the world. I no longer had to prove anything to anyone, to pretend anything to anyone, or to defend my actions to anyone. I was free!

I was free of an entire way of life. I was free of the burden of feeling sinful and dirty and guilty because I had dared to disagree with the doctrine of the Scribes and Pharisees. I was free to answer the questions that I'd been asking for so long, and I was free at last to be as objective about my analyses as I'd ever wanted to be. And, above all, I was free from a group of people who preached about Jesus Christ and who sanctimoniously pretended to believe his every word but who failed miserably at keeping the basic principles of his doctrine.

"Whosoever transgresses, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."

Go to **Chapter 3**