

The End Result of an Independent Spirit

(A letter to a concerned Christian from Ben Townsend)

Note: This letter was written to help a Christian who was sincerely burdened about the lifestyle, habits, and beliefs of someone close to them. When I shared these steps with the church, several individuals came to me privately and shared with me how the Holy Spirit had burdened them with people just like the ones described in the letter. This letter is to be used for edification, and not argumentation.

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To: M _____
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_____, Michigan _____

Dear M. _____

Thank you for your sincere, heartfelt questions. Your questions have prompted my heart to write you and encourage you as a brother in the Lord, and to answer your questions. You approached me and said that someone spoke to you and told you that they believed that:

1. The Pastor is not a Scriptural office for today.
2. The Sunday School is not in the Bible, so we should not do that today, because fathers should be teaching their children.
3. A pastor should not teach the wives because that responsibility is up to the husband, and,
4. What exactly is the authority of a local church and its function today?

You will recall my answer to you at that point was: "What a person believes does not concern me as much as why a person believes it." In other words, "What has happened in this person's life which has brought them to believe this?" I knew right away that this person was once very happy and growing in a local church. Let me explain.

I have had many experiences over my life and my ministry to understand this principle. I have seen many sons and daughters who grew up in a home where, because of definite acts of the parents, they grew to hate their parents, moved out of the home, lived with a partner, had children, and in their attitude became exactly like the parents they despised. At this point, I don't care near as much what these children (now parents) believe about raising their children and justifying their lifestyle as much as I care about what caused them to believe that way.

It is still a premise of Scripture and backed up many times in life that a man's morality dictates his philosophy and theology. Believe me when I say that it takes a deep hurt from a church, usually a pastor, for a person to arrive at such beliefs as you stated to me.

I have in front of me a book entitled, "Beyond Radical," by Mr. Gene Edwards. Mr. Edwards has echoed some of these same beliefs as the person which spoke to you. On page seven he lists seventeen items under the title, "What we do that is not Scriptural." These things are:

- 1) The Church Building,
- 2) Pastors,
- 3) The Order of Worship,
- 4) The Sermon,
- 5) The Pulpit,
- 6) The Pew,
- 7) The Choir,
- 8) Chapter and Verse,
- 9) Reading Scripture before a sermon,
- 10) The Funeral,
- 11) The Funeral Oration,
- 12) Sunday School,
- 13) The order in which Paul's letters are arranged in the New Testament,
- 14) The Seminary,
- 15) The Bible School,
- 16) Interdenominational and para-church organizations, and,
- 17) The matter of all Protestants going to church on Sunday at 11 A.M.

Mr. Edwards then spends twenty-three pages defending his seventeen points.

Understand what I am saying here. Mr. Edwards does not have a single footnote to back up any of his points. No one would believe what anyone says based solely on their word, without one historical footnote, unless it is a person who *wants* to believe it because it agrees with what they want to believe. You see, Mr. Edwards is much like the person to whom you were speaking. Mr. Edwards was once very happy and content in serving in a local church. That is, until he chose to go down eight steps which I will show you in this letter. Mr. Edwards would not hold his views if he were not hurt deeply by that church and pastor and decided that the Bible must have a better way than to have a pastor hurt you and your family so much.

That is the reason I know Mr. Edwards has based his theology on several "false ideas" which his circumstances have dictated to him. I am going to give you a few from his book to show you how far-reaching a man must go to try to justify his theology. Remember; never refute their beliefs on this level, because it then becomes an argument of personalities, and not truth. Jesus said that flesh and blood could not reveal certain truths to us, but only the Father in heaven. A Christian must not be guilty of debating another on the level of man's knowledge, or else we will show the tendencies to go down the same eight steps and end up with an insensitivity to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. So I give you my rebuttal of a few of his points because they will answer your questions as to whether we have a basis for what we do in our church. Then I will go through the eight steps which cause a person to believe this way.

First, let me take the list which Mr. Edwards has given us and argue from his viewpoint. He gives us seventeen activities which show that churches are not Scriptural. Based on his list, Mr. Edwards wants us all to go back to first century Christianity. My

mental response to this (without my spiritual compassion which knows why he believes this way) is to list for him seventeen things he does today which are not Scriptural.

- 1) He sells paperback books,
- 2) has a typewriter or a computer,
- 3) owns a car,
- 4) has a bank account,
- 5) wears colorful shirts,
- 6) has a sofa,
- 7) owns and watches TV,
- 8) plays golf,
- 9) has air conditioning,
- 10) has a stove,
- 11) has a heater,
- 12) uses a microwave,
- 13) has electric lights,
- 14) has a kitchen sink,
- 15) has an indoor toilet,
- 16) wears jeans, and,
- 17) celebrates his birthday and anniversary.

None of the previous things are found in Scripture. What allows him to use and justify each of these items?

You see, a definite choice the person you spoke to made as a response to being hurt by a church (usually it takes several churches to hurt deeply) has caused them to take on such a critical spirit that they can no longer differentiate between something “not Scriptural” and something “Unscriptural” when it comes to a local church.

The Church Building

Take the matter of the local church having a church building. This person will say (or end up saying if they continue on the same course) that a church building is not Scriptural and we must meet in homes because the churches in the New Testament all met in homes. Do you see yet how their understanding of Scripture has been somehow narrowed? Yes, most of the churches met in people’s homes. However, they have not seen that Jesus met with His church (disciples) in several places which were not homes. He taught His church from a mountain in Northern Galilee (Matthew 5-7), from a ship, in a ship, on a plain, next to the sea, in an upper room, and on Mt. Olivet (Acts 1:3-12). The church at Jerusalem met first in an upper room which could handle 120 people. (Would this person like to have 120 people in his house for ten days straight?) The next we see this church is outdoors on Sunday morning in a preaching service where 3000 were saved and added to the church. The church at Rome, during heavy persecution, met secretly in the catacombs underneath the city. Is this person claiming that they were “Not Scriptural?” I am sure logic dictated to early Christians in Rome that if all of them met in a home they would have been easily discovered by the soldiers, so they decided that worshipping and singing was so much better (and louder) in the catacombs. It seems they miss how that Paul took the Ephesian Christians out of the synagogue and met for two years in the school of Tyranneus. (“A church meet in a school? Never!”) Only if there is not a home large enough to hold all the believers. If the church *must* meet in a home then

we should write our brothers and sisters in Russia, who sneak out of their homes to meet with two-hundred other Christians in a clearing in the woods so they can worship without persecution and tell them that they are “not Scriptural.”

A grand example I have heard is that Pastor Samuel Lamb in China holds services in his home. The home-church movement in America applauds his success. Pastor Lamb spent eighteen years in prison for his faith. Pastor Lamb has over four-hundred in attendance in his “home,” with people sitting everywhere, including outside on the steps. The government regularly raids these services and drives all the people off. They all come back later. Pastor Lamb, used as an example of a home church, would love to have the ability to have a large building so more could come and be ministered to. By the way, how would the person you are talking with like to have four-hundred people in his home for Sunday services? Somehow doing that would make it more Scriptural in their minds?”

Ask this person if it is Scriptural for babies to be born in a hospital. If they say, “No,” then ask them if it is Scriptural for babies to be born at home. If they say “Yes,” then ask them to show you where it says that in Scripture. The conclusion they will come to is this: The only birth described in the New Testament is a baby born in a stable and placed in a manger. God used a stable because of the circumstances that there was no room in the “inn.” Then tell them that Jesus still would not have had a “home-birth” because if there was room, He would have been born in the “inn.” Are we doing something “not Scriptural” by having our babies born at home? With that line of reasoning our babies should be Scripturally born either in a stable or a motel.

Never Argue Mind to Mind

Now do you see why I would never argue with a person about their particular beliefs on the local church? It is because it simply sounds harsh, uncaring, and hateful. It would make them mad at me personally and they would feel the need to attack me back. This, however, brings them to their next conclusion.

Are Pastors Scriptural?

Mr. Edwards starts with this premise in his book, because if you can bring doubt in a person’s mind about the man Christ has placed to oversee the working of the local church, then you can bring doubt in other areas. I quote Mr. Edwards at length so as to not bring a personal bias into the quote:

(page 10) “Just how did the pastor idea get into Christianity? Here is the story. See for yourself if it sounds like it sprang out of ‘solidly based on the Word of God.’ Pope Gregory the Great first popularized the term ‘pastor’ in about 500 a.d. He did so by writing a book on the pastoral duties of the priest! The term pastor appears in no Christian literature before that point other than in a long list of people in the book of Ephesians. The practical meaning of the word is unknown. Pope Gregory told priests to carry out pastoral duties; to visit the sick, teach doctrine, marry the young, sprinkle the babies, conduct the Mass, bury the dead, and bless local events (such as festivals). These became forever the Roman

Catholic priest's pastoral duties. No such man and no such duties ever existed in Scripture."

Mr. Edwards would like people who have been hurt by a pastor to believe that the office did not exist before 500 A.D. Then they can justify the hurt by saying, "That's why he hurt me! The office came out of the Catholic Church. It's not Biblical!" Notice if I were defending the position of pastor with the intent of refuting his belief instead of understanding his need, the following is how I would do it.

The term "pastor" or "pastors" is used nine times in Scripture. It is the same word that is translated "shepherd" or "shepherds" sixty-three times in the Old Testament and eighteen times in the New Testament. Pastor equals Shepherd: Thus, we have our "practical meaning."

Jeremiah uses the term "pastor" eight times in his book. The first time is in Jeremiah 2:8, which says: "*The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the **pastors** also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.*" Interesting to note that between the priests and the prophets were another group which transgressed against the Lord – pastors (shepherds?). These guys could not have been shepherds over the literal sheep because in Jeremiah 3, verse 15, the prophet said: "*And I will give you **pastors** according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.*" This Scripture makes no sense if God said He would give them "shepherds." These were men, given by God, to feed His people "with knowledge and understanding." Jeremiah referred to himself as a "pastor" in chapter 17, and verse 16: "*As for me, I have not hastened from being **a pastor** to follow thee: neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was right before thee.*" God pronounces a woe on pastors in Jeremiah 23, verses 1 and 2: "*Woe be unto the **pastors** that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. Therefore, thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the **pastors that feed my people:** Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD.*"

A good, logical question to ask is: What are the functions of a shepherd over his sheep?

Does the shepherd instruct the sheep? Yes. He instructs them every day of the week except Sunday, right? Wrong. Sunday too. Does he bury the dead sheep, or does he just leave them there in the field? He buries them. Does he pray for his sheep? I hope so. Does he preside over the sheep? Yes. Does he wash the sheep when they need it? We all hope so. Do his sheep think he talks funny and prays funny? Probably.

Let us note for anyone who would carefully see the terribly deceptive phrase Mr. Edwards uses to prove a vital point. He said: "The term *pastor* appears in no Christian literature before that point other than in a long list of people in the book of Ephesians." Let someone who is sensitive to the Holy Spirit look at that sentence and let it sink in. Here is the problem with that point: The word "pastor" is an *English* word for shepherd and was not even a word in 500 A.D., much less before 500 A.D. If people want to accept Mr. Edwards' idea on such things without thinking, you just will not be able to force them to think. The Greek term for pastor is "poimenas," which is used several times in the New Testament. It is used many times in the writings of the Ante-Nicene Church

Bishops of the first and second century. Mr. Edwards has never heard of the “Shepherd of Hermas” written in 150 A.D.? That was 350 years before Pope Gregory.

Another point I would make is this: How does a person “first popularize” anything? That is a gross use of English. You can “first” use something, which Mr. Edwards does not believe Gregory did, or you can “popularize” something, which is severely different. To “popularize a term, the term has to have been in use “first.” The earlier bishops of churches used the term, knew what it meant, did it themselves, archived it in their own writings, and by themselves without my help, blew Mr. Edward’s philosophy out the window. (Not to mention the prophet Jeremiah showing Mr. Edwards to be a liar.)

Now do you see why it is impossible to present these views from a mental perspective? Someone who wants to believe what I am saying – will. Someone who doesn’t want to believe what I am saying – will argue again with it. “Well, he’s a pastor. He has to defend himself or he’d be out of a job.” Well, I’ve got news for the arguers. I don’t *want* to be a pastor. I don’t *like* being a pastor, I wish I were not a pastor. I don’t deserve to be a pastor. Sometimes I think God made a huge mistake when he called me to be a pastor. But, I’m going to be the best pastor for God that I can be as long as He empowers me to do His work. Think of it this way. Mr. Edwards makes more money selling copies of this single book in one year than I make as a pastor. I’m not in it for the money. I’m in it because God wants me in the center of His will and being a pastor is being in the center of His will. By the way, I have never referred to myself as a pastor, but if other people call me “pastor,” and most everyone in the church does, then it is a title of endearment which I wear humbly and undeservedly.

The other arguments from the person you spoke with are so irrational that I would have to hit myself in the head with a sledgehammer just to start believing them. “A pastor can’t preach to the wife of another man?” That is so ridiculous. That is like saying the shepherd can only instruct the male sheep, not the female sheep or the lambs. Did Christ tell Peter, “If ye love me, feed (only) my (male) sheep.” How in the world did Paul reach Lydia? How did Paul reach Lois or Eunice, Timothy’s mother and grandmother? Did Priscilla listen, or did she not listen, to the preaching of Apollos in Acts 18:26? Of course she did.

“A woman has nothing to say to a man, and can’t teach him?” I’m glad Priscilla “expounded the word more perfectly” to Apollos along with her husband. These people who rest their doctrine of women in the church on 1 Corinthians 14:34 (*Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.*) are treading on thin ice when it comes to understand Scripture. Again, recognize the leanness that God has sent because of bitterness and hurt feelings. It is impossible to get past these things and go on to a deeper fellowship with the Holy Spirit. This verse is in the context of “speaking in tongues.” The following are reasons I believe this:

1. Verse 21 states that “with **men** of other tongues will I speak unto this people.”
2. Verse 27 says that “if any **man** speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two...”
3. Verse 28 says that “If there be no interpreter, let **him** keep **silence** in the church; and let **him** speak to himself, and to God.” So the **men** are to

keep silence in the church under certain circumstances, also, and it deals specifically with speaking in tongues.

4. Verse 29 says that “***Let the prophets speak...***” and then outlines how they are to speak in tongues. Whereas, verse 34 says: “***Let your women keep silence...***” These are also instructions for women in the aspect of speaking in tongues. If the women speak in tongues in the church, “*it is a shame...*” If the need to know what was spoken about in tongues, they should ask their husbands at home.

5. Verse 39 shapes up the whole discourse on speaking in tongues, when it says, “*Wherefore, **brethren**, covet to prophesy, and **forbid not to speak with tongues.***”

Other non-contextual reasons:

6. The same Paul who wrote chapter 14, wrote chapter 11, verse 5, which states that women can pray or prophesy as long as their heads are covered.

“*But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.*”

7. This was the same Paul, who in 1 Corinthians 7:16 preached directly to the wife. “*For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband?*”

8. How could women “*Labor in the Gospel*” with Paul in Philippians 4:3 if they could not speak in the church or teach the younger women?

9. Paul told Timothy to treat the “*elder women as mothers*” in 1 Timothy 5:2. Does this imply that mothers could not speak to their sons in church?

Other logical conclusions:

10. What about a widow? How does she ask her husband at home? Is she not supposed to listen to the pastor at church?

11. What about young single women? They have no husband. What is their plan about speaking in the church? Where are their instructions?

12. They never think about a wife whose husband is lost. Paul deals with them in 1 Corinthians 7. Should they go home and ask their lost husbands, who did not attend church, what went on in church?

13. If a woman is to keep silence in church, period, then how is she to teach the younger women to love their husbands and their children, to be sober, chaste, keepers at home, etc.?

14. Stay with me on this one. Priscilla’s home was where the local church met in Ephesus. How, exactly, was she supposed to wait until she “got home” to ask Aquila questions? Could she call her husband out into the hallway and ask him right then and there? At what point was she to shut her mouth? At the start of the service? And where did she and her husband expound the Scriptures more fully to Apollos? In their home, which was where the church met.

Apology

So, you see how difficult it would be to try to defeat a belief through reasoning and logic? It always comes off as being sarcastic and hateful. As your pastor, I would never wish to harm the spiritual needs of friends or loved-ones by seeming harsh and unloving.

If they had not gone down these eight steps, they would be extremely joyous (like they once were) in a local church that is being blessed by God and that teaches and preaches the Word of God. Prejudices and bitterness of the past seem to destroy those who were once on fire for God in a local church. I remember the joy of the Lord as some I have known in the past sat in church with their Bibles open and soaked in the truth as the Holy Spirit revealed it to them. Let me give you the eight steps which a Christian goes through to end up with these kinds of beliefs.

Eight Steps to Disloyalty in a Local Church

Step 1:

The first step is in developing an independent spirit. An independent spirit comes when a member views the church as being there for his benefit alone. “What can I get out of it?” is their attitude. An independent spirit is the result of an unbroken will and the lack of a servant’s heart. It is either caused or amplified by the preoccupation of personal matters, often moral impurity, but sometimes temporal values.

Outward Signs: Certainly unkind words that this person will say about the pastor or others in the church in front of innocent children or those who are not part of the solution would be an outward sign of an independent spirit. They become inflexible to changes which the pastor makes which seemingly involves them. Also, they streamline a list of rights and expectations which the church or pastor must come through with or they threaten to leave, cut off tithe, or start to miss services. They have the “right” to not have the pastor preach against their sins. They “expect” love and kindness from the church. When these rights and expectations are soon broken, they move to step two.

Scriptural Insight: Philippians 2:20-21 – “*For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s*”

Pastor’s Response: The pastor looks for a servant’s heart.

Their Real Need: This person needs to re-establish harmony with those in authority in the church and look for ways of serving them. They need to clear their conscience of past thoughts and words directed about the pastor to others.

Step 2:

More sooner than later, their expectations will go unfulfilled by the pastor. Inside comes hurt feelings, envy of others, inflexibility when asked to do something for the church, distrust for the pastor, or downright apathy for the church. “Nobody cares if I go there anyway” is the attitude taken.

Outward Signs: Saying things to others like: “He’s not preaching the messages I need.” “I’m not growing.” “He’s not preaching doctrine like I believe or was taught it by others.” “He’s certainly not the man of God I used to think he was.”

Scriptural Insight: Luke 17:7-10 *But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are*

*commanded you, say, **We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.***

Pastor's Response: The pastor expects patience when changes are made which he feels are consistent with what Christ wants for everyone in the church.

Their Real Need: When a man's spirit is not able to be open toward God's approval, he counts all the more on receiving man's recognition. A person like this is performing for an audience – those from whom he desires praise, either God or other men. Determine if you are in harmony with God's will and the pastor's long-term goals. If God led you there, why do you harbor thoughts of leaving? If God did not lead you there, why are you there? Realize that the pastor is not the ultimate teacher of the Christian, the Holy Spirit is. This person errs when they see the pastor as a finished product. The pastor is growing also. These are times to approach the pastor with love, in the spirit of Matthew 18, and restore your fellowship with him and commit yourself to following his leadership. If they do not follow the simple truths in Matthew 18, taught by Christ Himself, then they will go on to step three.

Step 3:

God sends leanness to their soul – in the area of a lack of creativity. Fresh ideas or alternatives to plans the pastor has offered do not come to a person who has a root of bitterness inside them. Often the ideas he comes up with fail to take into account the whole picture which experience or responsibility has given to the leadership. Thus, the pastor rejects or sets aside this person's ideas.

Outward Signs: They develop a conflict in priorities. "Well, if the pastor is not going to listen to my ideas, I have other things I can be doing." "I can use my tithe to buy things for the church which I think the church needs." "I'll give all my offering to the missionaries. That'll show the pastor." You will notice them becoming religiously involved in other areas. Their religious activity is only a cover-up and takes the place of their real priority – a closeness to Christ and a closeness to brothers and sisters in Christ.

Scriptural Insight: Matthew 6:24 – "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*"

Pastor's Response: The pastor has to depend on others to do that person's share and give that person's share.

Their Real Need: "If you love something enough, it will reveal its secrets to you" is an appropriate truth here. Merely giving input in order to show others that they have ideas should reveal to them their critical spirit toward those in spiritual leadership. They should not give in to having their own ideas as a standard of judgment. They should ask God to remove all pride from them. If they continue on in their critical spirit, they will move to step four.

Step 4:

They become alert to the discontent of others. They discover that by distortion and sounding the alarm over the dangers of the ideas or doctrine of the pastor, they are able to recapture recognition among their friends for the importance of their ideas.

Outward Signs: They extend sarcastic sympathy to those who are serving in other capacities at the church – song leader, pianist, Sunday School teachers, associate pastors, ushers, etc. They make statements of disappointment to others about the church or the pastor designed to arouse curiosity for more details or their opinion about what’s “really” going on. They show sympathy toward others who are discontent about anything else. There is also a joking about church policy with an attempt to mock it.

Scriptural Insight: Psalm 15:3 – *“He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, **nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor.**”*

Pastor’s Response: He thinks harmony exists. He hears about the person being invited over to loyal Christian So-an-so’s house for the evening, and he is delighted that Mr. So-an-so can share all the good things the church and pastor are really trying to accomplish. There is a spirit of harmony between this person and other people in the church that secretly have fellowship in discontentment.

Their Real Need: Others in the church need to be taught to not follow someone whose real motivation is to be a threat to pastoral authority. They could help most by saying, “Have you shared this with the pastor?” “If I was the one who offended you, I could be grieved that you shared it with someone else before talking with me.” “I shouldn’t have heard this, but now that I have, I want you to go to the pastor in the next twenty-four hours. Tomorrow, I’m going to call him and see if you contacted him.” “What do you think God is trying to teach you through this experience?” “It would be good for us to find out what prompted the policy to be established.”

Step 5:

Now, with an “apparent” following, they attempt to humble the pastor. They plot to focus on specific faults in the life or family of the pastor which no one would be able to disagree. This is designed to give credence to their further ideas.

Outward Signs: They magnify reports of those who are discontented. Those discontented over little things could have just nodded their head in agreement with this person, but now this person used others to spread discontent. “Mr. So-an-so agrees that the pastor is just out of line when he...” “Everybody in the church is considering leaving if the pastor doesn’t shape up.” “The pastor’s son or daughter shows us that the pastor has major character flaws which he hasn’t taught his family.

Scriptural Insight: Matthew 12:25 – *“And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.”*

Pastor’s Response: The pastor hears from someone alarmed at what they heard someone else say. The pastor usually preaches pressure messages designed to cause people to become loyal to the church, which actually has the opposite effect. (“You see? He really doesn’t love us. Listen to his unkind messages.”) The pastor investigates to see what the allegations are. If the pastor humbled himself to the reproofs instead of defending himself, the danger would subside for a while until more discontented people could be found.

Their Real Need: Those who are proud need a spiritual leader who will show humility in the face of adversity. If this happens, the Holy Spirit will break the pastor’s heart and will, and revival is on the verge of taking place.

Step 6:

This person becomes the “silent” competitor to the pastor. The pastor who showed pride and tried to defend himself has given his competition all the ammunition they need.

Outward Signs: “See, I told you the pastor was guilty. Look how he defends himself and makes excuses for his doctrine (or his children, or his plans).” “Someone needs to knock him down a few notches. I won’t do it, but someone needs to.” “If he defends the area we all know he is guilty in, he’s probably guilty in these other areas too.”

Scriptural Insight: Galatians 6:4 – *“But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.”*

Pastor’s Response: He re-evaluates the past and plans his future. Most pastors who do not respond correctly to what the Holy Spirit is teaching him is making plans to leave. At best, if he does not leave, he will attempt to get rid of the “trouble makers” and start over. This response causes people to choose sides.

Their Real Need: No one in the church is happy. The messages are harsh and bitter. (Even messages which are not harsh are criticized.) The responses after the messages are harsh and bitter. Sincere new Christians cannot take it anymore and are discouraged.

Step 7:

The main person with the independent spirit experiences a fear of failures in his own life. His time and thoughts have been so consumed with “making the church right” that he has not completed jobs at work. Also, and more shattering, he experiences failures at home. His independent spirit has transferred to his wife and children. They see all the insufficiencies and inconsistencies of their husband and father. He has not spent time with them because of the failures on his job. His wife secretly rebels against him. His children hold loyalties to their friends at the church and can’t understand what their dad’s purpose is in hurting them and the church.

Outward Signs: Uncompleted jobs at work and home start mounting up. His wife realizes the inevitable (leaving the church) and gets involved in other areas. Children are confused. They were growing at the church, but now they are not. Church becomes a terrible place to go. They hear about the failures of the church and pastor traveling to and from church, at the supper table, and at the very least, overhearing phone conversations or whispering about it. This person finds comfort being with the discontented people of the church. The talk turns to how they can get rid of the pastor, leave the church, join another church, or start their own church.

Scriptural Insight: Galatians 5:15 – *“But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.”*

Pastor’s Response: The pastor does into denial of any problems. It is other people’s fault and not his. They should not have reacted and blown everything out of proportion. He feels he is trying to do the Lord’s will and the people do not appreciate him. A “self” humility follows.

Their Real Need: Their need is not to join another church. Because the root problem of their independent spirit is not conquered, the same result will take place again in another church. The need is not to start another church, because the discontent of the people are different. These differences will result in greater discontent later, especially when the common enemy of the previous pastor wears off (and it will).

The only time I have ever heard of a group like this changing was when a leading businessman whom they all respected was led by the Lord to visit someone in the group one night. It just so happened that the whole group was at this person's house when he came. When he realized what was going on, he warned them of the judgment of God upon their group and what they were doing not only to themselves, but also to their children. A few people in the group burst into tears and confessed all along that they knew they were wrong. They, and eventually all the others in the group, confessed their bitterness toward the pastor, and toward what the Lord was trying to do in their lives. They went back to the church and confessed to the pastor their wrong, which broke the pastor's heart also. The church experienced a real revival. The forgiveness and restoration of Christians is real revival.

Step 8:

The person with the independent spirit is given another "leanness" to his soul from the Lord. This is in the area of having insensitivity to the others in the group, especially his family. The result of a root of bitterness is having a lesser sensitivity to evil (especially in their own lives), a lesser sensitivity to the hurts of others (especially their family), and a lesser sensitivity to the Spirit of God. Because they are no longer in church, it no longer seems important to give the Lord the first day of the week, or the first part of their increase. The Bible becomes a book whereby they study a few minor doctrines of their choosing. The Holy Spirit cannot teach them, so they rely on "flesh and blood" (the books and messages of others who agree with them). They are forever learning in order to justify their being "right" in certain areas of Scripture.

Note: The Bible is not a book to show us we are "right," but a book to show us where we are "wrong."

Outward Signs: Minor points in the group are emphasized. Major and established points are neglected and questioned as being not necessary or "not Scriptural." Because of the emphasis of minor points, other churches do not want the group (nor does the group necessarily want another church), and no pastor in his right mind would desire to come pastor the group. Therefore the men (usually the one with the independent spirit, but not necessarily so) have to take charge of the services or Bible studies. The exaltation of minor points is an attempt to maintain the distinctiveness of the group and retain the loyalty of the group. The children are slowly destroyed by a lack of standards in major areas by the "new" spiritual leadership which is not called by God. "A man does not have to be called by God to preach" is one of the first doctrines which must be eliminated."

Scriptural Insight: 1 Corinthians 11:19 – *"For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."* Proverbs 26:24-27 – *"He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him; When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart. Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation. Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him."*

Former Pastor's Response: He hopes for confession from the group, but writes them off as enemies. He should respond with brokenness, prayer and fasting for the group. He should always be ready to meet the needs of any of the people with humility and kindness.

Their Real Need: The definition of heresy in the expository dictionary is: “Self-willed opinion which is substituted for submission to the power of the truth.” Confession needs to be made from the leadership of the group who started out with an independent spirit, and has influenced the lives of several to remain independent from God’s spiritual leader and the church which Christ has established in the area. Doctrines which must be established before the next generation is lost are: The Function of the Local Church, The Autonomy of the Local Church, Pastoral Authority, and Officers of the Local Church. The root of the problem, though, started out with an independent spirit, and this spirit must be confessed to God, the former pastor, and the church in order for God to start the healing process in the lives of everyone affected.

In Conclusion

So, you see why my heart breaks for one who would question major doctrines of the Bible which have been upheld for nearly 2000 years. It is not an attempt to “go back to the Bible days,” but it in reality is an attempt to justify a heart problem of bitterness which has taken hold and has grown for a long time. Hebrews 12:15 says, “*Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled...*” As a pastor, I hurt for the “many” who are going to “be defiled” as a result of the choices of one independent spirit who has become deeply bitter. They tend to do things now that a few years ago they would be shocked if someone did what they are doing now. They have in essence rejected godly discipline of a local church (Matthew 18:15-20), healing from the local church (James 5:14-15), and behaving like a Christian (1 Timothy 3:15).

Never argue minor doctrinal points with someone who has such deep bitterness. It will only amplify the bitterness. Pray for them that the Holy Spirit would reveal to them through the reproofs of life their independent spirit. Without confessing their independent spirit, there is no spiritual growth for them. Without going back to the root problem and making restoration with the person who they are bitter toward, there is no revealing of a new truth of the Scriptures. They must go to people like Gene Edwards (whom the same eight steps happened to) and get their theology, which has no foundation in the Bible or in history.

I trust this has been edifying for you and has given you guidance from the Holy Spirit as you pray for this person.

In Christ’s Holy Name,

Ben Townsend