

While, this is the sad picture of society in general, the state of the church is no better. Its fundamental character has been radically changed from that of a sincere prayer meeting (Acts 1:14), where soul-piercing preaching (Acts 2:37) prevails and the direct dealing of sound doctrine is in evidence (Acts 2:38; II Tim. 4:1-4), to that of a fun-loving group of party-goers, eager for multi-media entertainment, and averse to anything overly serious, sober, or soul-searching. This reinvention of “church” has altered its essential meaning from a holy time to a happy time, with all the associated frills and fanfare. As a result its ranks are now largely filled with an unsaved constituency, and riddled with unchecked marriage, divorce (except for fornication), and remarriage, fornication, adultery, social drinking, and an host of other sins that attend spiritual superficiality and indifference. Moreover, the deplorable state of affairs is generally accompanied by an apathy that refuses to lift a dissenting voice (Isa. 8:20), or even ask for a return to New Testament doctrinal norms and practices. Yes, ours is a generation that has lost its way spiritually, morally, and ethically.

As we survey the contemporary religious scene, a burning question should form in our minds: *“How can we find God, the true and living God of the Bible, in such a lost generation?”* In the remainder of this tract we will seek to answer this all-important question that confronts us now at the close of the age.

A Deep-Seated Search

Prov. 2:3-5: “Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; {lifest...: Heb. givest thy voice} If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.”

Isaiah 8:17: “And I will wait upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.”

Heb. 11:6: “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

If we are to find God in this decadent period of shallow religion, we must begin with a deep-seated and wholehearted search for that missing element of the true knowledge of God that seems to have eluded our generation. As Prov. 2:3-5 teaches, this search will take the form of a prayer quest, that cries to God with uplifted voice, while it seeks and searches for a genuine knowledge of the Biblical Jesus.

One aspect of the superficiality of the present religious culture is simply to accept what is traditional (Mk. 7:5-13) or customary, apart from a thorough examination of the source of the belief or practice, and a due consideration of whether it squares with the Word of God. In order to find God in the midst of the confusing mix of uninspired tradition, unbiblical custom, and cultural convention, we must look past the present order

of affairs in a prayerful and careful search to see what is so (Acts 17:11) based solely upon the Scriptures. This was the approach of the noble-minded Bereans, who, having heard the gospel that Paul preached, *“received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”* As we scrutinize those things which angels desire to look into (I Pet. 1:12), we will find, perhaps to our dismay, that contemporary religious belief and practice, as often as not, has absolutely no foundation in the Word of God. The “clarion call” of such searchers will accordingly be *“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them”* (Isa. 8:20) as they adopt the approach of the inspired psalmist: *“Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way”* (Ps. 119:128).

Our deep-seated search will yield some amazing discoveries. *“The Bible, and nothing but the Bible”* approach will soundly convince us that the current, popular version of Jesus, presented to the masses through the media of film and sentimental sermon, and portrayed on canvas by art and man’s device, is nothing but an unworthy substitute for the Christ of Scripture. This realization will bring fresh meaning to passages such as II Cor. 11:1-4, and Gal. 1:6-9, where Paul speaks in scathing tones of an alien gospel, and an altogether different version of Jesus, which seems to have captured the imagination of the gullible. The

Jesus we find through a refined search of Scripture will interpret salvation in terms of cross bearing discipleship (Matt. 16:24; Luke 14:26). Gone forever will be the idea that salvation is a matter of a glib prayer, without the wholehearted commitment to a radically changed lifestyle that results in persecution for righteousness’ sake (Matt. 5:10; II Tim. 3:12). The unsparing demands of Jesus that His followers give unhesitating obedience to His commandments, even to the point of not burying one’s own father (Luke 9:57-62) will seem rather stiff and unreasonable to the average contemporary churchgoer, but such radical discipleship captures the genius of New Testament Christianity. The call to follow Jesus transcends the nearest and dearest of ties (Luke 14:26), and unless one has counted the cost of such absolute commitment, salvation will remain but an elusive dream (Luke 14: 27-33). These truths, when once they dawn upon the soul and gild the mind with their radiant glow, will dispel at once the popular myth of “easy-believism.”

As this search continues, one will find that the Christian life takes on an entirely new meaning. No longer will Christianity be seen as a stamped passport to “the American Dream” of a leisurely and comfort-laden life. This is not to say that the gospel is a message of a miserable and materially deprived existence. God certainly does promise to provide for His faithful and obedient children, and to provide abundantly (Matt. 6:33; Phil.4:19;

II Cor. 9:6-11). However, as we are told in the Sermon on the Mount, the selfish accumulation of wealth, as an end in itself, is to be studiously avoided by the true disciple (Matt. 6:19-23). For the honest seeker, the old man's dream will be replaced by the new man's vision, and that of an heavenly sort (Acts 26:19).

Finally, this whole-hearted search, after the example of the Bereans, will bring us face to face, and perhaps for the first time, with authentic Christianity. Once we begin to view Christ, salvation, and the Christian life in a proper light, a *new standard of measure* will be given us, by use of which we will find that much of what parades under the banner of Christianity in our day is but a bogus brand of religion that falls far short of the apostolic model. We will now interpret *authenticity* in Christianity in terms of *apostolicity* (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20; Jude 3; II Cor. 4:3,4) and measure every doctrine and practice, however popular, by the yardstick of Holy Scripture and the apostolic precedent. Then, and only then, will we find the true God and eternal life through the Biblical Jesus (I Jn. 5:20).

A Dissatisfaction With the Religious And Spiritual Status-Quo

As one searches the Biblical record in the aforementioned manner, a deep sense of emptiness will fill his seeking

heart—an emptiness that demands to be filled. The prayer quest will at this point begin to intensify as the serious student of Apostolic Christianity begins to seek a full apostolic experience to correspond with his more Biblical understanding of the Christian faith. He will want to make his calling and election sure by a complete repentance from all known sin (Matt. 4:17; Acts 26:20), and a vibrant confession of Jesus Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:9,10). But he will not stop here, for to be fully apostolic in his faith, he must press by believing prayer into that endowment with power from on high that was first shed forth on the day of the original Pentecost when both men and women alike were *“all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”* (Acts 2:4). He must not shy-away from the Spirit's outpouring and the supernatural manifestation of tongues simply because some of the experience's loudest proponents are themselves leading lives of spiritual superficiality and impotence. Forgetting the inconsistent testimony of some, he will and must press through for a personal, old-time Pentecost, remembering that just as not all in Christendom is Christian, and not all who profess salvation possess it, so not all who claim the Spirit's power actually have the genuine apostolic experience. The crucial distinction to be drawn between a bogus and bona fide baptism with the Holy Spirit, may be summarized in this bit of verse:

*Is our pentecost that of olden day,
with flaming fire and mighty sway;
with ringing voice in testimony raised,
and tongues of power that God be praised?
Or is our pentecost of a poorer sort,*

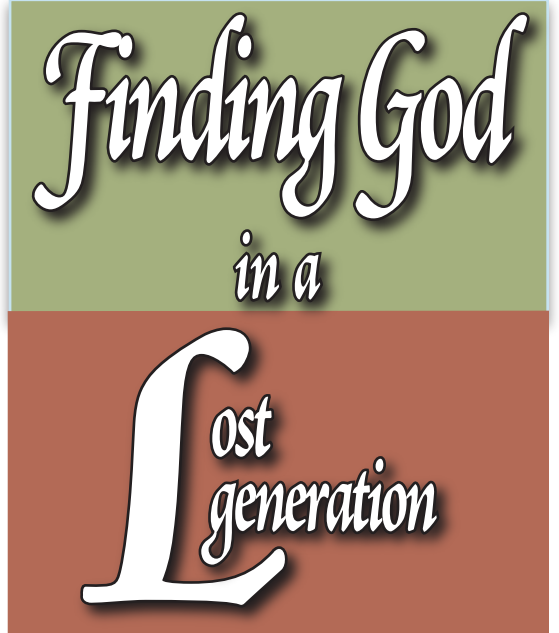
*without the fire or tongues to exhort;
Is it a modern, mild-mannered kind,
A product of a more sophisticated time;
Does it leave us empty and not full,
Giddy and light instead of filled with might;
Of what sort, pray tell, will your pentecost be,
A sound from Heaven, or a substitute leaven?*

A Desire For The Old Paths

Jer. 6:16: “Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.”

This quest for the living God would not be complete without the fundamental desire to obtain by prayer and maintain by holy zeal (Jude 3) the ancient and authentic, in contradistinction to the contemporary and counterfeit in religion. When our deep-seated search has found the Biblical Christ, and our dissatisfaction has found fulfilment in the apostolic experience, there is yet need for a continual yearning for the full range of truth and understanding contained in the *“faith once delivered to the saints,”* lest our souls fall prey to a sense of attainment, and we fail to inquire for that *“something more”* that lies before us (Phil. 3:13,14) in the Christian walk. True rest, both for time and eternity, will be ours when our one desire is that of the psalmist: *“One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple”* (Ps. 27:4). Lord, evermore give us this desire!

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Jer. 29:13: “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart”; Ps. 42:7: “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.”

Ours is a generation that has lost its way. Priding itself in an unprecedented sophistication and loudly touting *“new advances”* in technology, an attitude of self-sufficiency and arrogance has now become one of the leading features of the age. With this budding of pride (Eze. 7:10) has come an alarming drift from God, the authority of the Scriptures, and a Biblical morality. A new-breed of independent thinkers has arisen to oversee the systematic breakup of marriage and the family, rampant immorality of all kinds, and an overall plunge into degeneracy that threatens to pull society apart at the seams.