

nothing because of *our* righteousness. Thus no family or specific group of people “own” their respective congregation and must not operate as if they do.

2. Activities are not a substitute for doing what God instructs us to do. “*Go ye therefore...*” are marching orders for every Christian. If we have energy and resources to use *beyond* doing this — perhaps additional activities would be useful. A total focus on seeking and saving the lost eliminates the petty self absorbing activities that *consume* most congregations.
3. Elders are shepherds. They must focus on the souls of those in their care. A church that is growing because of souls being saved must have an eldership that is ready and willing to oversee the new Christian to maturity in Christ. They are not dictators or managers — but shepherds responsible for souls.
4. The Bible must be viewed as the inspired Word of God and valued as such. Doubt *cannot* exist if growth and contentment is the goal.
5. Christians must be humble servants. They cannot win others to Christ while beating on their chest proclaiming their own greatness and exceptional desire to serve their God. *God* is great. We are his *servants*.
6. When believers fail to place their faith and trust in God and misplace it in other members, ministers, elders, etc. they are destined to be disappointed. Faith and trust in God should not be replaced by anyone or anything else. We certainly may trust fellow Christians, but must resist placing them on a pedestal — for they will surely fail to measure up to our expectations.
7. Honesty must return to churches. Souls seeking a Savior must *know truth exists* and we must not fail them by candy coating Biblical truths. At the same time we must allow them to grow in Christ as their understanding of Scripture expands.
8. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges of current times is to recognize that the battlefield has changed. It is still important to hold to doctrine as it relates to the numerous ways in which the Church is peculiar in the world, but that cannot be the focus of our attention. For too long, churches have fought (not only within but also among themselves) over Church issues while the lost go un-approached. A congregation must know and practice as they believe the Bible instructs and at the same time focus on reaching the lost. A mission of having the perfect church practice must not remove the focus of seeking and saving the lost for those of us who are Christians.

Too many people are quietly slipping away from the Body every day because they have become discontent with either their own faith, their relationship with God or the workings within their local congregation. We *can* make changes that will stop the epidemic — we just need to do it!

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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Epidemic of Discontent

The publication of *Diligence* over the past 8½ years has caused us to develop a heightened awareness of numerous changes happening to religion in America. In our opinion, most of those changes have not been for the better. We have noticed that almost all of the research sources we use concerning the state of religion in our Nation today have one unfortunate constant mentioned *somewhere* within the heart of the material. Almost without fail, an extremely high level of discontentment and discouragement is expressed among Christians today. While the *reasons* mentioned in the various resources may widely differ from person to person, an overall mood of dissatisfaction is *consistently* apparent.

This high level of discontentment becomes apparent when we take a close look at the books on the shelves in the “Religion” section of any bookstore. The subject matter of a dis-proportionate number of those books consists of various authors attempting to provide readers with ways to seek and acquire a new and improved relationship with God — often through the use of numerous mental exercises, new approaches, more “current” ideas, or simply “better methods of connecting” with God than have existed in the past.

Discontentment concerning ones Christianity or ones relationship with God often results in a deviation from the Scriptures — and *that* is certainly not new. *That* began to occur before Scripture was even completed. Just look at many of the letters. For example, I John 2:18-19 discusses a departing from the truth.

“*Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.*” (NIV)

What is different today however, is the willingness of people to move further and further from Biblical based instructions — while still *professing* to be Christians — in favor of *anything* that will bring them temporary satisfaction. The eagerness of so many individuals to *try* anything and everything is encouraged by the speed of communication today. The almost completely effortless access to all kinds of deviate “religious” practices can quite easily transform an almost imperceptible discontentment into a diabolical discontentment. The Devil will take every possible opportunity to use the freewill and curiosity given to mankind by God as a powerful tool to create discontent with ones faith in God. For example — one

simple way the Devil might use mankind's *own* ability to use his *own* logic is to fill him with an ever increasing belief that *everyone deserves* to be happy — *especially* Christians — and he (the Devil) is more than willing to accommodate the individual who becomes convinced of that. He will supply an endless trail of deviate unscriptural practices to an individual who becomes convinced that there is a bigger, better, more exciting and more satisfying way to continue in his or her Christian walk.

Christians who constantly pursue the self satisfying “happy trail” will eventually become discontent with their relationship with God. We see this demonstrated through many current day preachers who instruct “believers” to just do — such and such — and wealth, health and happiness will be the reward. When the smoke clears from such unscriptural teaching, the stark realization becomes apparent. The “believer” missed out on all three of the promised rewards and therefore becomes more miserable than ever. Thinking the particular preacher was simply a “con” — the “believer” pursues some other “version” of “religion” — only to experience the same disappointment. The individual then becomes bitter toward “religion and churches” and wants nothing more to do with either. He or she stops attending services and becomes even *more* bitter when no one even notices — much less cares.

Most of us *know* individuals who grew up in the Church — but later — as adults, became discontent and left the Church. While reasons vary — the discontentment became more than the individual was willing to tolerate and he or she simply gave up the effort to deal with it — and gradually fell away.

After many years and much reading and research, we have concluded that there are a few *key* characteristics that are true concerning this epidemic of dissatisfaction and discontentment many people express today concerning the Church and their faith in God. These are in no particular order — but we'll mention several.

First, people can be converted to a church and not be converted to Christ. We see this in I John 2 when it says, “*They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us*”. Conversion to a church rather than to Christ results in a desire to please the church *rather* than please God. This causes many people to live a lie since they fear retaliation of fellow members if they do not walk in lock step with whatever is in vogue for their particular congregation. So they reluctantly (and silently) march along — following people and preachers instead of simply following God. The pressure to follow in lock step with things *other* than Scriptural demands and commands becomes more than they are willing to tolerate. Minor problems become big problems and they eventually just lose interest in the “race” and give up.

Second, personal Bible study has been replaced by almost anything that makes people feel warm and fuzzy. This is the opposite of serious study of Scripture that convicts us of sin and exposes us to the mind of God and His plan for us as Christians.

Third, some people have bought into the lie that the Bible is not the inspired Word of God. This destroys the ability to have God provide order for their life.

Fourth, congregations are sometimes portrayed as the moral standard to be imitated.

This can result in the “church” becoming a laughing stock of the community as members fail to meet this high standard of conduct. It is better to be humble followers of Christ accepting that all fall short of the glory of God.

Fifth, an over abundance of Church activities can drain energy from congregations by keeping everyone too busy. This can result in changing the focus of a congregation from the mission of seeking and saving the lost to one of serving each other and isolating us from those we say we want to save. Pretending we care about the lost is a great lie in churches that spend *all* of their spare time fellowshiping with *each other*.

Sixth — proud Christians. The lack of humility that exists in many Christians is their most apparent personality trait. In the business world today there is an expression, “The bigger the cross the bigger the crook.” Simply stated, this means that those who are outside of Christ perceive “acting holy” or using “churchy” terms in an effort to identify oneself as a Christian to be a complete turnoff and an obnoxious trait. It is seen as phony and insincere — regardless of how honest and sincere the Christian might *intend* it to be. Many non-Christians do not see it as an individual giving credit to God. Rather, they see it as an arrogant attempt to bring attention to oneself as a “holier-than-thou Bible thumper.” (We plan to have an entire article dealing with this subject sometime in the near future).

Seventh, busying ourselves doing good deeds has taken precedence over following God's Word in more important ways. The mission is to seek and save souls for eternity. If a marathon were scheduled to raise “awareness of the lost state of mankind” would anyone show up? Yet every month Christians everywhere expend huge amounts of time, money and energy going all over the country to raise money for the cure of this or that illness or disease. Those things are of course not *bad* — but isn't our awareness of lost souls far more important? Yet, how many would “show up” for *that* marathon? More souls are dying from being lost than are dying from *any* illness or disease we can mention.

Eighth, far too many Christians no longer really believe the Bible. Many people believe there are *numerous* paths to heaven, thus calling Christ a liar.

Ninth, too many elderships and church leaders are interested in the church as an *organization* — without sufficient concern for the souls therein. This changes the Church to nothing more than another *earthly* organization they have to “manage.”

This is surely not an exhaustive list of key characteristics that cause discontent among Christians but it's a start. So now that we have stirred up this hornets nest what do we suggest? First of all, we want to make it clear that we certainly don't believe we have *anything* “figured out,” but we *do* believe there are some clues that can help us to begin correcting this epidemic of discontent. Here's a few ideas.

1. Know who we are and who we are not. Acknowledge in all ways that the Church is bought and paid for by the blood of Christ. As members of His Body we own