

001 An Introduction

- Have you ever wondered as to whether today's '21st Century Church' has much resemblance to the 'New Testament Church'?
- Have you looked aghast at what so-called Christian minister's preach, support and uphold in today's society?
- Have you ever stood back in amazement as you watch what so called Christians do to each other?
- Have you ever thought, "if that's being a Christian – you can keep it"?

Well before we go too far down the road too soon, let me introduce myself.

Hi. I'm Bob Holdstock known in the USA as "British Bob". I graduated from the Elim Theological College in the United Kingdom in 1965. I've had the privilege of leading fellowships in England and South Wales, as well as offering on going input and counsel into a number of church fellowships and leadership teams.

My steadfast partner, most precious friend and lovely wife Pat and I were married in 1967 and have 2 wonderful daughters and 6 fantastic grandchildren.

In 1993 we moved from the U.K. to California with our youngest daughter and pioneered a fellowship in Auburn. In 1998 we moved to Richmond Virginia and led a fellowship there for a number of years before moving back to Chico in California in 2004.

Although my father was a minister as was my grandfather too, I have constantly challenged and questioned the religious norms that are accepted as almost 'gospel'. In other words, I'm not your typical or traditional type minister.

I owe a great deal to many true men of God but in particular, Gordon Hills and his dear wife Nessie, who was senior minister in High Wycombe U.K. He truly challenged my belief system and helped me on the road to find answers to my questioning.

Further my own brother-in-law and sister Brian and Shirley Hayes of Edinburgh Scotland helped formulate so many answers and have had great input into my life over the years, for which I am so thankful.

Others like, Ian Andrews, Gerald Coates, Graham Perrins, Tony Fitzgerald, Tom Brock, Ray Brookes, John Cairns, to name just a few, have added light to my pathway on my journey and to the Lord I am so grateful for his kindness and mercy.

I am so grateful to a number of these Godly folks who have agreed to share in this service and have contributed studies in the spheres in which the Lord has ministered to and through them most. I know you will be blessed and challenged by their teaching too.

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A special word of love and appreciation goes to my own elder brother Bill and sister-in-law Pauline who have been role models of persistency through many trying times. He too has lovingly taken on the task of proof reading these studies and has added much value in grammar and word suggestion. So if there are any errors or omissions we can blame him!

In the 1970's we became involved with the growing house church move taking place in the U.K. Through this involvement more of my questioning found further direction and answers.

Over the years, along with maturity, (mostly brought about through bumps and bruises), and a developing understanding of "God's Unshakable Kingdom Principles" I have sensed a prompting by the Holy Spirit to put into written study form much of what has been learned, (although there is still so much more to grasp).

There is growing dissatisfaction with 'traditional church' and scores of people say they don't like going to 'church', and are leaving in droves. Sadly many of them have never come through to a real saving faith in Christ Jesus and are gone, while others who love and know the Lord, end up drifting aimlessly.

I look at the body of Christ today, listen to Christian folks, hear the heartache and disillusionment of many church leaders, and am saddened in heart. It is very significant how many church leaders themselves don't want 'church' as we have known it, myself included.

However there is an excitement inside as I personally believe what is happening is not by chance. I believe the Lord who is the Head of "The Church" is behind it. From His throne at Father's right hand, He has shouted out "I'm taking My Church Back".

We have created church and religious systems, structures and constitutions, programs and hierarchy, boundaries and controls, rules and regulations, patterns and formats, rights and rituals that the Lord Himself never intended or initiated.

Remember the account in Marks gospel chapter 9 verses 2 –8 of Jesus being transfigured. Listen to what Peter said in verse 5.

5 Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters (or Tabernacles) — one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

Moses represented the Old Testament Law and Elijah represented the Old Testament Prophets.

Peter desired to contain or hold onto what he had seen and experienced, so he suggested making a structure to keep it in. The voice of God told him to 'shut it' and listen to Jesus, as something NEW was about to take place. Suddenly it all changed and was gone.

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We have not learned from this scriptural account. We do exactly the same thing today, but we name them ‘denominations’, ‘Associations’, etc. Friend there is NO difference between Peter’s desire to hold on to, and today’s desire to hold on to, but more of this in our studies.

Little wonder that much of our problem is the confusion over “The Church,” “The local church body,” “The local church building,” “The Kingdom of God,” “The Body of Christ,” “The Bride,” “The Temple of the Lord,” “The Fellowship,” “The Sanctuary,” “Elders,” “Deacons,” “Ministers,” “Reverends,” “Right Reverends,” “Pastors,” “Clergy,” “Priests,” “Bishops,” “Arch Bishops,” “Laity,” “Cardinals,” “Popes,” “Holy Fathers,” and the list goes on.

This confusion is based on misunderstanding and ignorant expectations related to all these titles of which most are ‘**man made**’ anyway.

This series is an attempt to help bring some clarity. Although I am sure it will also create much controversy, as it will challenge many belief systems just as I was challenged many years ago.

As we progress through this study series, I know there will be many who will not agree with me just as I don’t agree with much that is called Church and Christian.

To disagree is fine, but to condemn and criticize is not all right unless it is heresy proven by scripture. Even then it should be with love and concern with the view to restore truth.

To have open debate is good and healthy but keep it in Christ’s right spirit of love and humility.

That doesn’t imply you don’t say what you mean in straightforward terms, you will find I do. Although I might attack the religiosities or the unrighteousness hard, I do not attack any individual. Many of my dearest and closest friends in ministry don’t agree with me on everything or I them, but it doesn’t shake our relationship of love in the Lord.

Like the song in the film ‘The Sound of Music’ “let’s start at the very beginning, the beginning is a very good place to start.” To lay hold of what the Father desires to bring us into we need to examine so many things from, ‘The beginning to the Last Day’.

In case you didn’t catch it, this is a subtle warning that this series may not have an end; it might just ‘keep on rolling along’, because when you start looking at all the Lord has done and revealed and is still doing and revealing, and will yet do and reveal, how do you find the end?

These studies are not intended to take away from personal searching of the scriptures and research; in fact the opposite is the intention. So always have your Bible and concordance at your side.

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These studies are intended to give serious thoughts and insights to encourage the readers to study for themselves, either as individuals, study groups, or even as foundation thoughts for sermons etc.

But we must all come to a personal place of “knowing in whom we have believed” and also based on God’s Word be able “to give an account of what and why we believe.”

Far too many people have Bibles, they take them to church on a Sunday and that is the only time they open them. You can always tell, because when you give out a scripture verse to look up and read they don’t even know where the books of the Bible are. This is a sad indictment as their very daily life and Spiritual food is within its pages.

Another ‘progressive’ aspect of church is the projector. Now that the Bible in its various versions is in software format, it is so easy nowadays to project the verse on the screen as the preacher preaches.

Now one doesn’t even have to open our Bible on a Sunday, it’s on the screen in front of us.

So may be not all that is ‘progressive’ is valuable.

Please don’t misunderstand me here. I *use* all methods including computers and projectors to get illustrations and visuals across. I used to put verses up, until I realized this sad fact – now I don’t.

Again much of what we shall cover might be new to you and to others very controversial, you might even feel like putting your fist through your computer monitor in anger, but as I submit these studies all with humility, like the Apostle Paul, I haven’t obtained yet but I keep pressing on to that upward call in Christ Jesus. I ask of you the same humility to receive and examine the scriptures closely and honestly for *yourself*.

There are many teachings that we are “told” are true and that we should believe them, yet many of us don’t take the time to search the scriptures and test what we are told, for ourselves. This is what I am encouraging you to do and come to your own honest belief in God’s Unshakable Word of Truth. It is not that I expect you to believe all that is taught here, but my desire is that whatever you finally do believe, you know the Scripture and know why you believe it.

As a point of reference, most scripture quotations used in these studies will be in the “New International Version” known as the NIV. Other translations will be noted like “The Message” (THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language © 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved.) - a paraphrase to help open an understanding. Also the King James or Authorized version is used as well as ‘The Living Bible’.

The only way to understand the whole series is to start with the first study and progress through them one by one.

The studies are designed in a step-by-step progressive format for individual, small group study or even provoking thoughts for sermon material.

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The desire and goal is that these studies being made available via the Internet, are for many thousands (and with a lot of faith!!), millions of folks around the world.

We recognize that not all are privileged to have Bibles readily available so all the scripture that is quoted will be written out in full, so the verses referred to can be read by all.

As a relationship in the body of Christ, Pat and I are part of Wave of Life Ministries. We have known Tom and Suzie Brock for nearly 30 years and are delighted to work with them and under their banner. You will see more information related to their ministry under the Resources and Links tab on our web site.

My prayer is that you will find answers to many of your questions and find the peace again that passes all understanding. Find again the joy of your salvation; find the excitement again of being part of His glorious Kingdom and true fellowship as being part of "His Church".

I must point out that these studies are given totally FREE to download and/or photocopy for personal or small group study, and if so desired for folks use as preaching and teaching material. However under International copyright law, they are not to be sold for a price or on a donation basis in any written or electronic format.