

The Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage to Salvation

Preparing For Pentecost

Part 1. Do You Live As A “Cloistered Christian?”

*Please prayerfully take your time going through each section of this lesson and consider **both** the information and the questions. Your heartfelt responsiveness and determination matter to our Lord, so don't try to complete an entire lesson at once. Also, you'll reap greater benefit if you go through each lesson with others close to you.*

More About Your Faith Pilgrimage

We've intentionally released this lesson right after Resurrection Day, 2015 for a specific reason. You might say that the preceding lessons in our *Gospel of the Covenant* series have brought you to this weekend: celebrating our Lord's full payment for your sins and His glorious resurrection. But our focus in this lesson and the several to follow are aimed at helping you prepare for Pentecost.

Our Father knows that each and every person who follows Jesus as Lord of their life needs His Spirit to both *guide* and *empower* them. Please use this opportunity to ensure that *you* are indeed born of His Spirit and are in step with His Spirit the way His first followers were in the Book of Acts. It's His indwelling presence and power within those who are born again that enable you to live in the miraculous as they did. And like Jesus, they were focused on carrying out the Father's will for His glory (Philippians 2:13).

The prayer our Lord gave His followers modeled the framework of truth in the Hebrew Scriptures and affirmed *doing* our Father's will:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...” (Matthew 6:9-10). Doing His will in the *power of His Spirit* assures us that we belong to Him.

Why has it been so hard for those who call themselves “Christian” to do the Father's will in loving and obedient trust? We hope to show you one hindrance in this lesson.

Plato's Ongoing Influence On Christians

One of the most destructive teachings that invaded Christianity in the 3rd and 4th centuries and subsequently dominated it was *cosmic dualism* through Hellenist “Church Fathers” enamored of the Greek philosopher Plato. This particular world-view presumed that anything pertaining to the physical world was evil, and anything spiritual was good. How contrary to Scripture and the God Who declared *all that He created* to be good! Through this heathen influence which became the foundational thinking of Christianity, a religious caste system developed:



- The *upper class* pursued a spiritual calling such as clergy and monastics. They were considered “holy” and “pious” because they separated themselves from worldly concerns to focus on higher, spiritual matters.
- The *lower class* were the “profane” laity who worked in the world and had no distinct spiritual calling in their lives.

[For more on *cosmic dualism*, see Chapter 6 of Restoring The Early Church: *Greek Philosophy in the Church—How Did Plato Displace God?* <<http://www.restorationministries.org/pdf/books/rtec/Sec10RTECChapter6.pdf>>]

Cosmic Dualism Gave Rise To Modern Cloisterism

A “cloister” is any place you can seclude yourself either by shutting yourself in and/or shutting others out.





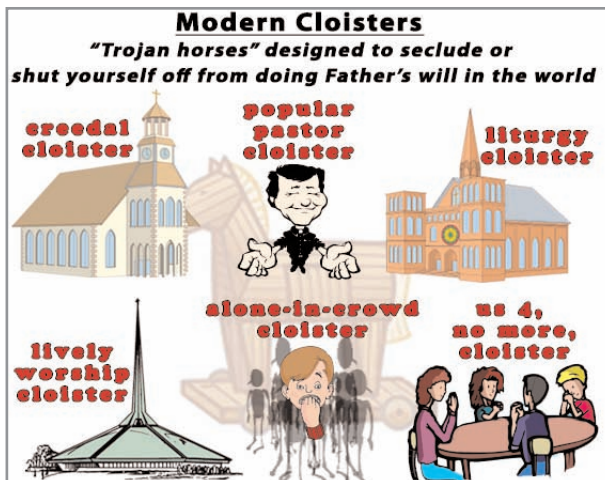
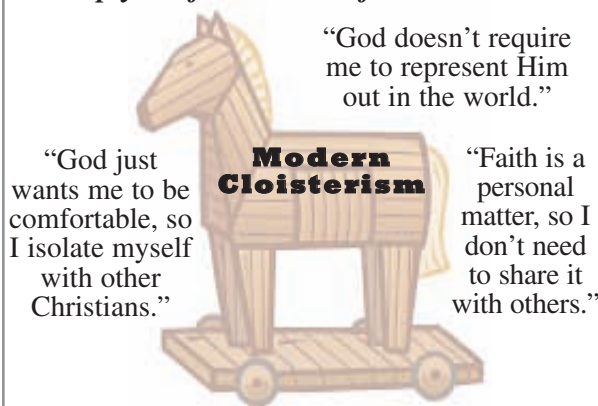
With all the monasteries and the thousands of churches operating for centuries throughout Europe, why is it called a “post-Christian” continent by missiologists? The answer: *cosmic dualism*.

Most of us have never seen a cloister of monastics. Monasticism means literally to “dwell alone,” someone closing themselves off from the world to live in seclusion by pursuing a spiritual life. For centuries monasteries dotted Europe. Even though they were largely self-contained islands of literacy in an agrarian society, because of *cosmic dualism* they were also a “Trojan horse.”

A “Trojan horse” is anything destructive that masquerades as benign.

Modern cloisterism is far different than someone fleeing the “profane” of this world by moving into a monastery to pursue a higher spiritual calling.

Today’s Trojan Horse of Cosmic Dualism: “keep your faith hidden from the world”



Modern Cloisterism is a deceptive focus by which individuals and faith communities close themselves off from doing the Father’s will.

Creedal cloister: Committed foremost to a fixed formula summarizing core tenets of the Bible.

Popular pastor cloister: Committed to a particular individual’s reputation and/or style of teaching the Bible.

Liturgy cloister: Committed to a pattern of worship based on custom and tradition.

Lively worship cloister: Committed to a worship style that is expressive, lively and vigorous.

Alone-in-the-crowd cloister: Committed to being with people with no relational responsibilities.

Us 4, no more cloister: Committed to limiting the size of the group to maintain intimacy.

When your motive for being a Christian or for fellowshiping with others doesn’t revolve around doing the Father’s will as His Son’s beloved servants, then some form of cloisterism is going on. If your cloister isn’t one we’ve listed above, then some other means of cloistering yourself is motivating you.

- Do you identify with any of the cloister types we’ve shown?
- Are you in a different type of cloister system? If you are, what type? What is your motive for being there?

What is the Nature of Life for an *Un*-cloistered Christian?

The first-century Hebrew followers of Jesus recognized no separation of the holy and the profane. But because cosmic dualism pervades Christianity today, little of the Hebraic perspective is taught. Our Hebraic forefathers who first followed our Lord Jesus realized from the Hebrew Scriptures (the only Bible at the time) that no particular occupation was “holier” than another.

Holiness—being set apart by grace for God’s use—was and still is available equally to all through *repentance*, trust in Christ, rebirth, and the ongoing work of the indwelling Spirit. From our Father’s perspective, holiness is this:

A repentant person with love-grounded obedient trust lives *set apart from the world’s values* in order to fulfill His purposes for His glory (Ephesians 4:22-24). And His purposes call for His children to represent Him IN the world, not be secluded away from it! (See 2Corinthians 1:12.) True holiness—*set-apartness for God’s use*—calls for those who love Him and live repentantly to be Christ’s ambassadors IN the world (2Corinthians 5:20).

Our Hebraic ancestors in the faith viewed *all* of life, both *spiritual and physical*, as God’s dominion. He wasn’t relegated to the spiritual domain alone; He made His presence felt in all aspects. Therefore all of life’s pursuits done according to God’s will and ways were “sacred.” A job was reckoned just as “holy” as time spent studying God’s Word. That’s because there was *no division* of sacred and secular as in the *cosmic dualism* later introduced by Hellenist philosophers.

If you have an *un*-cloistered understanding of your relationship with our Lord, you view your life in this world as

purposeful in serving as His ambassador in all you say and do (1Peter 3:15). Representing His Person and His love is a *developmental process* in that you want nothing of your old self to remain (2Corinthians 7:1). *Intentionally* becoming more like your Lord by His Spirit causes your heart attitude and your will to continually yield to Him as He develops more and more of His character in you. Our Father wants His children, His Son’s ambassadors, to stick out as light in a dark world as Jesus does (Matthew 5:14; John 8:12).

As a follower of Jesus you’re called to serve Him in love and obedience on the frontline of extending His Kingdom (see John 14:21). Everything else taking place in your faith community relationships supports what the Spirit is empowering you to do to extend His Kingdom in the world. But if your faith community supports *cloisterism*, then the leadership is primarily focused on keeping a religious system running smoothly so that you’re comfortable and complacent—and regularly attending services to pay the bills.

If you're in an *un*-cloistered faith community, the leadership is supporting you through example and discipleship to use your spiritual gifts IN the world to serve as Christ’s ambassador.

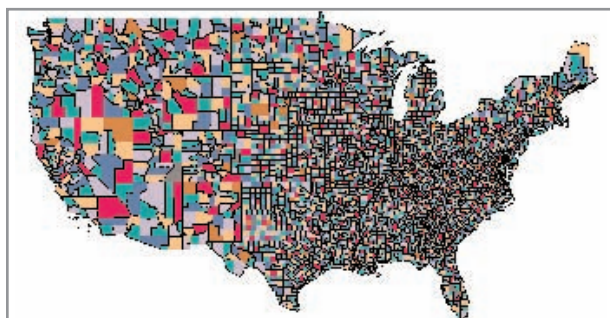
- Answer this for yourself: When you leave your faith family gathering, do you feel *launched to serve* until you meet again, or satisfied that you attended?
- If you're born again and our Father's child, are these your mutual life goals?
 1. Your fellowship with others must spur you on to glorify our Father and Jesus through praise, worship, and living testimony.
 2. Your fellowship with each other must spur you to mutually grow in Christ’s likeness as His Spirit works in you and through

you.

3. Your shared fellowship must spur you toward repentance and the narrow gate.
4. Your fellowship must spur you to reveal Jesus to the lost in your daily life and love them as He does.

Does your fellowship family abide by all of these critical components of walking together in Jesus in loving and obedient trust? If not, which ones are missing?

- How much do you “stick out” and shine as a follower of Jesus and His ambassador?



With all the congregations in all of the counties throughout this nation, why is the USA considered a “post-Christian” continent by missiologists? The answer: cosmic dualism.

Where Has The Seed of Truth Fallen in Your Life?

(Luke 8:11-15)

Fruitful living; doing God’s will at all cost:

1. *“Seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, receive it, and by persevering produce a crop.”*

To “*receive* the word” means to welcome it with agreement and obedience. Followers of Jesus who hunger for God’s will to be done in and through their lives are willing to pay any cost to serve and obey Him *because of their love for Him*.

Cloistered away from doing God’s will in the world:

2. *“Seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.”*

Many Christians don’t want to be fully yielded to the Spirit and be changed. They live “horizontally,” gauging their spiritual life by what others in their faith community are doing.

3. *“Seed on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.”*

These Christians wait for endorsement by religious leaders before even considering anything new. They really fear exclusion by others.

4. *“Seed along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.”*

Many of these are religious leaders who don’t have the Holy Spirit within and won’t allow themselves to be changed no matter what truths are presented to them. So they imprison and keep unfruitful 2. and 3. above.

- In what type of soil has the seed of God’s truth fallen in your own life?