

Chasing God: Destiny or Delusion?

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Foreword

I first picked up a copy of *The God Chasers* off the bestseller shelf at my bookstore because several friends had strongly recommended it. It was the kind of book that could change your life, I was told. I'd never heard of Tommy Tenney, but I was willing to see what he had to say.

To my surprise, I didn't make it past the second page of the introduction before the flags started appearing. Something's wrong here, I thought to myself. I read further. More flags. By the time I'd finished, there was a deep urging in my spirit to carefully examine the book again, and to write what I saw. I asked my husband, Don, to read some of it as well. When he too found problems, he encouraged me to take on the project.

As I studied the book a second time, and a third, I found it easy to identify a number of weaknesses in Tenney's arguments. I also began to grasp the larger picture of his understanding of Christianity, which he presents with integrity and consistency throughout the book.

What I was not able to figure out was why I seemed to be the only one having such difficulty with this book. Some of the men who wrote the opening endorsements were people I highly respected. I went to an internet bookstore and found 45 on-line reviews, all extremely positive. I continued to hear favorable comments from my friends. I also heard stories of churches who were recommending *The God Chasers* to their entire congregations.

It is partly because of this huge stream flowing in the other direction that I want to write my response with great humility. I truly believe Tenney has tapped into a powerful vein of public interest and desire. I am certain that many of his readers have found his intensity and passion to be very refreshing in a world of listless traditions and theologies. There is nothing in me that wants to quench the authentic searching of people after God, because I know He is eager for them to find Him.

"Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found of you, says the Lord."
(Jeremiah 29:12-14)

Introduction

*Weary, broken, desperate for You
What I've known will no longer do
I'm so hungry, Jesus, touch me
Blessed are those who are...famished
Emptied of all I thought was true
Take my life, Lord, fill it with You
Bread from heaven feed my craving
Blessed are those who are...
Famished, I'm famished
Manna, come fill me
I'm famished, I'm famished
River of God flood my soul*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst
For they will be filled*

*Lyrics from "Famished"
by Scott Williamson and others
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There is a longing deep in the hearts of many of God's people today for something they can't quite put their finger on. They've had experiences of worship that left them almost breathless. They've seen miraculous answers to prayer. They have watched the supernatural hand of God reach into their ordinary existence and one way or another change their lives forever. They believe in the reality of God and His love for them. But something is still missing.

Out of the swirl of this hunger that can't quite be described and the anticipation of an experience that stays just beyond their vision, there has emerged a spokesman who seems to be saying what so many have wanted to say. Tommy Tenney, in his book *The God Chasers*, has captured the attention of thousands of believers, particularly those in charismatic churches, who are ready to see a fresh outpouring of God's power as we enter the new millennium.

In lively, compelling dialogue, Tenney lays before his readers a challenge to passionately pursue the very face of God. He describes a process of repentance and death to self which he believes will be the catalyst to bring the Christian church into a radically new experience of the glory of God. Tenney is convinced that as God's people move more fully into His presence, there will be a "spilling out" of His power into the communities of our land, bringing to birth the revivals for which we have sought and prayed for so many years.

It is clear in scripture not only that God desires for His people to seek Him with passion and persistence, but that He will in fact "be found" by us. One of the greatest truths of the Christian faith is that our Creator is a personal God who desires an intimate relationship with His children.

However, it is also clear that we come to God, and God comes to us, not on our terms but on His. If we are truly seeking a deeper relationship with God, it can only happen as we conform to the plan He has laid out in the Bible. Therefore, I believe it would be wise to step momentarily away from the burning hunger in our spirit to ask if the path Tenney describes is in fact the way in which God can be found. There is no doubt that he has touched a valid nerve in the souls of believers. But does he with similar accuracy comprehend the heart of God? Are the steps he recommends truly those that God would lay before us?

My goal in writing this manuscript is to share the answers I've found to these questions. In order

for you to find any of my arguments convincing, however, you must understand that I believe the written Word of God to be the final judge and jury on what is truth. There is a strong tendency in our contemporary culture to trust our personal experience over and above anything that is handed to us on paper.

I do realize that it isn't always a simple matter to hold doctrines or ideas side by side with scripture and make valid evaluations. The Bible is very complex, and has been the source of innumerable theologies that don't appear to have that much in common with each other. I shall be making every effort to handle the scriptures with integrity, but I also urge you at every step to seek the aid of the Great Counselor, the "Spirit of truth," whom Jesus promised would be available to "guide you into all truth." (John 15:26)

A Matter of Truth

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31,32)

The very first flag I encountered as I read Tenney's introduction was his statement, "There is a vast difference between present truth and past truth." He precedes this with the explanation, "A true God chaser is not happy with just past truth; he must have *present* truth. God chasers don't want to just study from the moldy pages of what God has done; they're anxious to see what God is doing." He makes a similar comment in a footnote to Chapter 5. "My purpose here is to caution Christians against the practice of reading the Bible in a permanent state of 'past tense' perspective. 'Look what God did *back then* with *those people*. Too bad He doesn't do that today with us.'" (81) [Note: all italics in material quoted from Tenney are his.]

What we need to notice is that Tenney's idea of truth is what God *did* and *does*. He does not draw our attention to who God *is*, nor does he consider what God *has said*. The Bible for him, in these contexts at least, is a history book of God's activities. It tells of the ways He showed His power to people long ago. The paragraph in Chapter 5 that is being footnoted reads as follows:

We make a great deal out of reading the Word and that is important. But we need to remember that the early Church didn't have access to what we call the New Testament for many years. They didn't even have the Old Testament Scriptures because those expensive scrolls were locked up in synagogues. The only Scriptures they had were the verses from the law, the Psalms, and the prophets that had been passed down orally from grandfathers and grandmothers – and that only if they were Jewish believers. So what *did* they have? They walked and talked with *Him* in such a rich level of intimacy that it wasn't necessary for them to pore over dusty love letters that were written long ago. They had God's love notes freshly written on their hearts. (74)

In this paragraph, about halfway through his book, Tenney expresses an important assumption of *The God Chasers*, which is that the essence of Christianity is the experience of personal intimacy with God. It's "walking and talking" with Him, almost the way Adam once knew Him. Which I'll admit is an enticing concept. It somehow *feels* right.

Tenney chooses to validate his assumption by referring us to the life of the early church. The problem is that what he tells us is not exactly an accurate description of what was happening then. Let's look at the account in Acts.

And with many other words [Peter] testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:40-42)

In this snapshot of the community of believers in Jerusalem, we find a people who were brought to God by "many other words," and who "continued steadfastly in the apostles' *doctrine*." Additionally we are told that they spent much time in the community of believers, rejoicing together and caring for one another's needs. Prayer, or personal communion with God, was the third activity of this unusually healthy spiritual family. But there is no indication that their private experience of God became more important than their fellowship with one another or their study of God's word,

much less that it might have replaced them.

My first observation, then, is that Tenney is on a very wrong track when he implies that we should turn away from the “moldy” accounts of God’s past activities and seek something different. The early church seemed delighted to hear every word He’d ever spoken, through the law, the prophets, or through His disciples. And they weren’t alone. Christ Himself continually quoted scripture, and deliberately tied the events of His life to the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament. Paul urged Timothy to view all of scripture as being “given by inspiration of God,” and “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” (II Timothy 3:16) He reminded the Roman believers that “whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” (Romans 15:4)

What I think Tenney is really asking for is not new *truth*, but a fresh encounter with the power (i.e. activity) of God. That’s a legitimate desire and one we all share. However, it is dangerous to put the label of “truth” on any experience, profound though that experience may be. What happens when we do this is that we can be drawn away from the real meaning of truth. I’d like to offer instead what might be a more accurate definition. Truth, I believe, is *the combined elements of reality that exist in (or flow out of) the very nature of God*. In other words, it’s not so much what God does, but what He is.

Let me explain. The idea of truth assumes that there is something eternal out there, and that it has always been and will always stay the same. We may never be able to entirely figure it out, but it’s there, because the God who established it is eternal and unchanging. One of the most damaging deceptions of our contemporary culture is the idea of relativism, which would convince us that there are many “truths,” and that it’s up to us to choose one for ourselves, based on whatever feels right or works best for the moment.

Jesus, on the other hand, exhorted His disciples to “abide in My Word...and you shall know the truth.” (John 8:31,32) John calls Jesus the *Logos*, or eternal word of God, which has existed from the very beginning of time (John 1:1). The scriptures have been given to us specifically to reveal and record His unchanging character, both through the words He spoke and through His interactions with human history.

It’s quite possible that God may act in new ways today. It’s even possible that He may speak new words. But what is *not* possible is for Him to change His eternal nature. Thus, all of today’s words and actions that are truly of God will be entirely in harmony with all that has been spoken and performed by Him throughout all time.

For this reason, Tenney is wrong to suggest that we can ever safely turn our attention away from the Bible. God’s Word has been given to us to be the final standard against which we must judge all ideas and all experience. Consider David’s devotion to scripture.

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalm 19:7-11)

I guess if there were no sin in this world, and no deceptive forces, then perhaps we could trust

our personal instincts to keep us from error. But there is much that can deceive us, and the reason David was so enthralled with God's word (which in his day was little more than the history and law that Moses had recorded), was because he understood that these documents were his rock of refuge, a reliable North Star that could steer him safely through the complexities of life.

It wasn't that David didn't also value intimacy and relationship. God called David "a man after His own heart." (I Samuel 13:14) David went through his days with great confidence in the real power of God to protect him, to provide for him, and even to slay giants through him. In a later chapter we will examine more closely the nature of intimacy, in Tenney's writings and in scripture. But for now, let us hold tightly to the assumption that God chose to reveal the truth of the universe in the pages of His Word, and that as they are illuminated by His Spirit, they become our most trustworthy guide for knowing God and His ways.

A Matter of Hunger

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." (John 6:35)

I'm going to bypass for the moment Tenney's opening description of the events in a Houston church, which he says ignited his passion to pursue the presence of God. He came out of that experience, however, convinced that the reason God does not visit His people more often is because we are not sufficiently hungry for Him.

As far as I can tell, there is only one thing that stops Him. He is not going to pour out His Spirit where He doesn't find hunger. He looks for the hungry. Hunger means you're dissatisfied with *the way it has been* because it forced you to live without *Him* in His fullness. He only comes when you are ready to turn it all over to Him. God is coming back to repossess His Church, but you have to be hungry. (12)

According to Tenney, our hunger is the longing of our spirit to experience the presence of God, which he describes as bread. As he sees it, the reason the church does not have the hunger it should is because we have satisfied ourselves with something less than real bread. We feed on memories, the "crumbs of yesteryears' revivals." (20) We stock our "dusty" bread shelves with "bland, man-produced religious ritual." (68) We have "satiated our hunger for Him by reading old love letters from Him to the churches in the Epistles of the New Testament." (15) We "never have intimacy with Him" because we have "stifled our hunger for His presence by *doing things* for Him." (15)

By contrast, Tenney observes that people in the world are very hungry for God. "Wealthy and poor alike flock to flashy seminars about enlightenment and inner peace, gullibly swallowing every bit of the unbelievable junk being passed off as the latest bright revelations from the other world." (23) He says it is entirely the fault of the church that these people haven't been able to find the real thing.

It's time for some church, somewhere, to forget about trying to be a "politically correct church" and break open the heavens that the manna might fall and start feeding the spiritually hungry of the city! It's time that we punch a hole in the heavens and break through in hungry travail so the glory of God can begin to shine down on our city. But we can't even get a trickle to flow down the aisle, much less see His glory flow through the streets, *because we're not really hungry*. (32)

Again Tenney has given us here a concept that sounds and feels very credible. My question however is the same: what is his foundation for this idea in scripture?

He follows the above paragraph with a quotation from Jesus, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6) But Jesus seems to me to be talking about a different kind of hunger. Those who are "gullibly swallowing...bright revelations from the other world" are probably not looking for *righteousness*. As Tenney himself notes earlier, they want to "connect with a higher power." (2) It might not be appropriate to assume that even if we offer them Christ's bread of life, they would really be interested in it.

The most extensive scriptural support Tenney offers for his panorama of hungry people seeking bread is an adaptation of the story of Ruth and Naomi. I say adaptation, because I find that he takes some interpretive liberties which I think miss the more solid message of that story.

He begins by comparing the journey of Naomi and her family to Moab with the migration of people away from the church, because there was no bread in either place. In the case of Naomi, there was simply a famine in Bethlehem. In the church, the presence of God is missing. During her stay in Moab (which Tenney calls a cruel place), Naomi loses her husband and sons, and faces “nothing but a gloomy and disastrous future.” (21)

However, rumor has it that there is bread once again in Bethlehem, and, Tenney says, in the church as well. So Naomi’s daughter-in-law Ruth, whom Tenney describes as a “picture of the unchurched unsaved,” sidles up to Naomi, a “picture of a prodigal,” and says, “If you heard there is really bread there, then I’m going with you.” (25) He concludes the story as follows:

Two things happen when the bread of God’s presence is restored to the Church. Naomi was a prodigal who left the house of bread when that table became bare. Yet once she heard that God had restored bread to Bethlehem, the house of bread, she quickly returned. *The prodigals will come walking back into Bethlehem* from Moab once they know there is bread in the house, and *they won’t come alone*. Naomi came back to the house of bread accompanied by Ruth, who had never been there before. The never saved will come. As a result, Ruth became part of the Messianic lineage of Jesus when she married Boaz and bore him a son named Obed, who was the father of Jesse, the father of David. Future royalty awaits our hunger-spurred actions. (25-26)

The problem I have with this interpretation is simply that it isn’t honest. The Bible never indicates that Naomi was a prodigal. She was merely an obedient wife who complied with her husband’s solution to the famine problem by moving to another country. Moreover, her return to Bethlehem was the proper thing to do, not because there was bread there, but because it was the land of her people. There was probably still plenty of bread in Moab when she left.

When Ruth decided to accompany her mother-in-law to a foreign land, it had nothing to do with bread; rather, she was deeply devoted to Naomi.

Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me. (Ruth 1:16,17)

I think it could also be argued that God’s decision to honor Ruth by placing her in the lineage of Jesus had more to do with her loyal submission to Naomi and later to Boaz, than it did with her hunger for bread.

Interestingly, later in the book Tenney takes similar liberties with the story of the prodigal son.

Our churches are filled with “career prodigals” who love their Father’s things more than their Father. We come to the family dinner table not to ask for more of the Father, but to beg and persuade Him to give us all the things in His house that He promised are rightfully ours. We open the Book and lick our lips and say, “I want all the gifts, I want the best portion, the full blessing; I want all that belongs to me.” Ironically, it was the father’s blessing that actually “financed” the prodigal son’s trip away from the Father’s face! And it was the son’s new revelation of his poverty of heart that propelled him back into his Father’s arms. (121)

There is actually a deeper problem here in Tenney’s strong implication that the Father resents

giving us good gifts, which we shall discuss elsewhere. For the moment, I would observe that what drove the son home was not “poverty of heart,” but ordinary hunger.

But when he came to himself, he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’” (Luke 15:17-19)

You may think I’m being ungenerous with Tenney, and that it is acceptable “poetic license” to mine scripture stories as he has for symbols to convey the points he wishes to make. But I think it’s not as harmless and innocent as it might seem. You see, even though his reader probably has a sense that Tenney is taking some descriptive liberties, there is still an underlying intention to validate his arguments by integrally tying them to biblical references. It’s one thing to say that Ruth “sidled up” to Naomi, which doesn’t matter that much. It’s another thing to transform her loyalty and devotion into greed for bread.

Before I go further, I should acknowledge that there *is* great reality to spiritual hunger, and that Jesus does offer Himself as the “bread of life” to those who come to Him (John 6:35). But I believe it is vitally important to let scripture describe that process directly; our task is not to impose an idea from outside the Word, but rather to extract truth from what is really written. Hopefully we shall be able to do some of this as we progress.

A Matter of Experience

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.... It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1:18,21)

A strong theme that weaves itself throughout Tenney's writings is that these days God does not wish to save or perfect or empower us through knowledge, but through an encounter with His presence. Let's look at it in his words:

We've tried to cram doctrine down people's throats, and we've printed enough tracts to paper the walls of entire buildings. I thank God for every person reached by a gospel tract, but people don't want doctrine, they don't want tracts, and they don't want our feeble arguments; they just want Him! (48,49)

We understand "program evangelism," where we knock on doors or pass out tracts, or some other program of the church designed to reach the lost. John Wimber helped us to understand "power evangelism," where we mix anointing with the program. In this form of evangelism, we might pray for someone to be healed on the street instead of just witnessing or giving out tracts. But there is a little understood, much underused form of evangelism that I call "presence evangelism." This is where people take note, saying, "They have been with Jesus" (see Acts 4:13). This is when the residue of God on a person creates a *divine radiation zone* of the manifest presence of God, so much so that it affects those around you. (114)

Before I comment on the content of these passages, let me address the scripture in Acts that Tenney mentions. It reads,

Now when they [the priests, rulers, elders and scribes] saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (NIV)

It seems to me to be pretty clear that what astonished these Jews was, first, Peter and John's courage, and second, their ability to teach (even though they were "ordinary and unschooled"). The disciples' prior association with Jesus was a negative feature to these leaders, and in fact upset them quite significantly. But as verse 14 explains, there wasn't much they could do to the men at the moment, since Peter and John had just healed a crippled beggar and were quite popular with the crowds.

I'm not quite sure why Tenney has such a dislike for tracts and doctrine, but it's evident that he doesn't much trust them. Consider these statements:

It is dangerous for us to be led by our "number-crunching intellect" because we can over-analyze the causes and the purposes of God. We'll end up like the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes of Jesus' day who missed their hour of visitation. (124)

Too often God's people can be guided only by the written Word or by the prophetic word. The Bible says He wants us to move beyond that to a place marked by a greater degree of

tenderness of heart toward Him and by a deeper maturity that allows Him to “guide us with His eye” (see Ps. 32:8-9). (37)

God is tired of screaming instructions at the Church; He wants to guide us with His eye. (47)

Checking Psalm 32, we find again that Tenney did not get his idea *from* these verses, but has attached his meaning to them.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you.

Here we see that God makes “instruction” and “guidance with His eye” either one and the same, or else two activities that work in partnership. The opposite of eye-guiding is not teaching, but direction through force (the bit and bridle) because an animal doesn’t understand (or won’t go along with) the owner’s wishes. God wants us to comprehend and be attentive to His directions, eagerly doing what we know will please Him.

Because Tenney has chosen to move away from such traditional mechanisms for ministry as preaching and teaching, he is forced to attribute what I think is an unusual amount of power to experience.

In all my reading and study of the Bible, I have never found any person mentioned in the Scriptures who really had a “God encounter” and then “backslid” and rebelled against God. Once you experience God in His glory, you can’t turn away from Him or forget His touch. It’s not just an argument or a doctrine; it’s an *experience*. (35)

Several times Tenney suggests that God’s presence can be “soaked up,” not through our minds, but somehow through our bodies.

Whatever or whoever is exposed to the manifested presence of God begins to absorb the very material matter of God. Can you imagine what it was like in the Holy of Holies? How much of the glory of God had been absorbed by those badger skins, the veil, and the ark itself? (38-39)

He wants us to be so saturated with His presence and glory that we carry His presence with us everywhere we go in this life. This may be the only way the unspeakable glory of God will find its way to the shopping malls, hair style salons, and grocery stores of our nation. (150,151)

He seems to be implying that the gospel can now be spread simply by being physically near to someone who has “absorbed” God’s glory. This is, in my estimation, *close to* truth, but dangerously misleading. If Tenney were to say that our conformity to the image of Christ (that is, the visible quality of His Spirit that has been worked into our natures) was able to draw unbelievers to ask us questions that might lead to their conversion, I would agree emphatically.

But Tenney appears willing to take conversation out of the event.

When the glory of God comes, we become like the prophet Isaiah. Our flesh is so weakened

by His presence that it is unnecessary for man to do anything other than behold Him in His glory. I've come to the conclusion that, in His presence, I am a man without a vocation. There's no need for me to preach if God shows up in His glory. The people are already convicted of His holiness simply by His presence. Simultaneously they are convicted of their unholiness and their need to repent and live holy before Him. (44)

It may well be true that when an unbeliever encounters the glory of God, he will be acutely aware of his own unrighteousness in contrast to God's holiness. But it is, I think, an unjustified leap of faith to assume (as Tenney must) that somehow (in this powerful experience) the unbeliever will also understand the truth of the gospel message, which is that God has fully paid for our sins through the sacrifice of His Son, and that faith in Him is the only path to our restored relationship with the Father.

The Bible clearly tells us that people are brought into the kingdom only through the communication of this specific information.

It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (I Corinthians 1: 21-24)

The picture I see everywhere in scripture is that God has ordained a dual ministry which requires *both* the message and the miraculous. Mark tells us that after Jesus ascended into heaven,

[The disciples] went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. (Mark 16:20)

In Acts 5 we probably have the closest example of what Tenney might consider to be "presence evangelism."

And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed. (Acts 5:14-16)

Reading further we find that the high priest and some Sadducees were unhappy with the commotion and threw the apostles in prison. When an angel of the Lord released them later that night, however, he did not instruct the men to walk back through the streets casting shadows. Rather he told them to "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." (Acts 5:20)

You see, it was not the apostles' healing ministry but their preaching that was offensive to the officials, and it was precisely that preaching that God wished them to continue. Peter and his friends were promptly re-arrested (having obediently gone back to the temple as they were told).

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look,

you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"
(Acts 5:27,28)

The world loves healings and other miracles, but it does not love the "stumbling block" of the blood of Christ. If our experiences, wonderful though they may be, fail to point directly to the glory of the gospel message, we shall not only *not* lead people to Christ, we ourselves may also become vulnerable to whatever deception our enemy might wish to draw us into.

A Matter of Obedience

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. (2 John 6, NIV)

When there are no words attached to an experience, it is up to the individual to interpret the meaning of that experience. Similarly, in matters of moral behavior, we either make judgments based on what we've learned from something outside ourselves, or we have to use our inner intuition. It's interesting that the word "obedience" holds no prominent place in Tenney's discussions. The closest I could find was the idea of "response" (Okay, God, what do you want me to do? (80)).

It's time to look at another rather extensive scripture study that Tenney offers us. This time he compares the current situation of the church to that of the children of Israel at Sinai.

We are camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, much like the children of Israel in the book of Exodus. It is obvious that we have reached the point where we are going to have to make a decision. Will we go in or run away? (68)

Tenney tells us that God has offered to make them (and us) into a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. But there is a choice to be made. He lays out that choice using two scriptures: Exodus 19:13b, and Exodus 20:21. In the first, God's word to the people through Moses was, "...when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount." In the second reference we read, "And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was." (70,71)

Tenney interprets the Israelites' decision in this manner.

They saw the lightning and heard the thunder, and they shrank back in fear. They ran from His presence instead of pursuing Him as Moses did. ... So the end result of their flight from holy intimacy that day was that they died before they or their children ever entered the promised land. *They preferred distant respect over intimate relationship.* (71)

Later he adds,

What a picture. The people are running this way while Moses is running that way, saying, "Come on, guys, it's God. He's just saying, 'Come near to Me.' He's never done this before. When I was up on the mountain He let me get this close, and now He's come down because He wants all of us to draw near to Him together." (76)

When I first read this section of *The God Chasers*, I was astounded at how far Tenney's rendition was from what the Bible actually says. Let's retrace his steps, filling in a few more verses.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever." ... Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.' ... When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain."

... Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. (Exodus 19:9-17)

It is very apparent that—far from being disobedient to God—the Israelites did exactly what He commanded. They came near the mountain, but they didn't touch it.

God's intention at this period of history was *not* to establish a close, one-on-one relationship with every individual (that came after Calvary and Pentecost). Rather, He seems to have had two agendas. First, He desired to communicate the terms of His covenant to Moses. He emphasized the importance of the people witnessing this conversation, so they would "believe [Moses] forever."

Second, God wanted to impress the Israelites with the terror of His presence. Listen to the description.

Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. (Exodus 19:18,19)

Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. (Exodus 20:18)

God purposely frightened them. Moses explained later that God had come to test them, "that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." (Exodus 20:20) The regimen of laws God was about to give Moses would be very difficult to obey unless the people truly feared God.

I want to look now at another Bible character whom Tenney also mentions in his book, King Saul. Here is Tenney's account.

The Church has been "playing church" for too long. It is time for someone to stand up and say, "The era of Saul is over!" Saul was a king after the flesh; David was a king after the Spirit. Saul was a king chosen because he stood head and shoulders above everybody else (according to outward appearance and qualifications), and he "appeared" to be the right one. He was named king only because the people pressed God for "second best." Saul quickly lost his God-given mandate to rule by choosing to please men by his actions instead of God. There is no room for a politician in the stewardship of God. We have only one "public" to please as children of God, and that is the audience of One who made us for His own pleasure. (87)

First, let's clear up one misconception. Saul was *not* chosen by the people (for his appearance or any other reason), as Tenney implies.

So when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said to him, "There he is, the man of whom I spoke to you. This one shall reign over My people." (I Samuel 9:17)

This happened long before the people had any idea who would become king.

More importantly, Saul lost his kingdom for a reason that is entirely different from what Tenney presents. Let's look at the story.

Samuel also said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'" (I Samuel 15:1-3)

As the story continues, we see that Saul did as Samuel commanded, with two exceptions: he spared the Amalekite king Agag, and he saved back the best of the livestock for sacrifices to God. The next morning, when Samuel went to find Saul, Saul greeted him enthusiastically.

"Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord." (I Samuel 15:13)

Saul actually had no idea that God would be displeased with him. He thought he had obeyed. But God's perspective was quite different.

So Samuel said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being King. (I Samuel 15:22,23)

Here we can see why God went to the lengths He did at Sinai to frighten the children of Israel. It's a little hard for us in our laissez-faire culture to comprehend this level of absolute legal requirement, but it truly represents the just heart of God. Saul's error was not that he didn't care to please God. It was that he didn't take God seriously enough to heed the exact words He had spoken.

Once again, we see how important it is that we pay attention to truth. Good intentions do not impress God; obedience to His commands does. Back at Sinai, God's promise to make Israel "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" was conditional, but not, as Tenney would have it, on their eagerness to pursue the presence of God.

And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.'" (Exodus 19:3-5)

The reason the children of Israel could not enter the promised land when they finally arrived at its borders was not at all because of their "flight from holy intimacy." Rather, when God told them to go into Canaan and take the land, they chose not to obey. For all the testings in the wilderness, and for all God's miraculous provisions along the way, when it came time for final exams the people still had not learned to fear, and on the positive side to trust in, the infinite wisdom and power and authority of Jehovah God.

A Matter of Repentance

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. (Acts 3:19)

We discussed in an earlier chapter Tenney's strong conviction that it is our lack of hunger that has prevented God from filling our churches with His manifest presence. But if hunger is what he believes we need to *have*, repentance is what he is convinced we must *do*, in order that God might be released to move as He desires to.

Repentance prepares the way and makes the road of our hearts straight. Repentance builds up every low place and takes down every high place in our lives and church family.
Repentance prepares us for His presence. (14)

God cannot come close to living flesh because it reeks of the world. It has to be dead flesh for Him to come close. So when we beg for God to come close, He will, but He also says, "I can't really get any closer, because if I do, your flesh will be destroyed. I want you to understand that if you will just go ahead and die, then I can come near to you." (60)

Intimacy with God requires a certain level of brokenness because purity comes from brokenness. (80)

These are all very compelling words: brokenness, repentance, and dying. If today's Christian community is truly "famished," then at least some of us are probably willing to say, "Whatever the cost, we will pay it."

There is one significant problem however that immediately surfaces when it comes to a discussion of repentance. Quite simply, repentance requires not only that we realize we have sinned, but also that we understand the nature of our sin. The Greek word translated "repent" is *metanoeo*, which means to think differently or to reconsider. The only way we can repent for a sin we have committed is to realize that God's way of looking at it doesn't match ours. When Tenney uses expressions like this

How long has it been since you said, "I'm going for God"? How long has it been since you laid aside everything that ever occupied you and ran down the road of repentance to *pursue God*? (14)

there is a kind of vagueness that makes repentance more of a general emotion (I feel bad about myself), than a response to the convicting of God's Spirit regarding our specific sin. Because Tenney seems to have walked away from any scriptural characterization of righteousness (at least in this book), he leaves his readers to rely on their own perception of sin, which may or may not be biblically accurate.

Nevertheless, even though it isn't well defined, Tenney lays out a rigorous picture of what our repentance must accomplish. He clearly understands it to be a spiritual housecleaning of such magnitude that when we are done, God can actually enter our churches without either being offended at what He finds or else destroying us with His holy presence.

We have to deal with more than our outward actions; we have to deal with our inward

motives also. We must come clean, because God can't reveal His face to a partially pure Church. It would be destroyed in an instant... So remember to pass by the altar of forgiveness and sacrifice on your way into the Holy of Holies. It's time for us to lay our egos on the cross, to crucify our will, to lay our own agendas aside... Nothing alive can stand in His presence. But if you're dead, then He will make you alive. So all you need to do is die if you really want to get into His presence. (80)

I perceive that Tenney has, in passages such as these, merged powerful truth with dangerous confusion. Let me position a portion of his writings next to the Bible, so you can see for yourself what I'm talking about.

In Chapter 4 Tenney explains that the priests of Israel tied a rope around the ankle of the high priest when he made his annual visit behind the temple veil into the Holy of Holies, so that if he died in the presence of God, they could drag out his body. He then tells us

God is looking for someone who is willing to tie a rope around an ankle and say, "If I perish, I perish; but I am going to see the King. I want to do everything I can to go behind that veil. I'm going to put on the blood, I'm going to repent, I'm going to do everything I can because I'm tired of knowing *about* Him. *I want to know Him. I've got to see His face.*" No matter who you are, what you've done, or what religious tradition you embrace; the only way you are going to go through that veil is through the death of your flesh. The death of genuine repentance and brokenness before God will allow Him to draw near to you. (62)

The truth in Tenney's statement is that indeed God does require us to die. As we described earlier, the Old Testament law was uncompromising: our sin is absolutely repulsive to God, and condemns us to death. But he fails to communicate, in passages such as these, that we walk today in an astonishing freedom which Christ purchased with *His* death.

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

We no longer need to grope our way behind the veil, feverishly praying that we have sufficiently purified ourselves so we might not be struck dead in God's presence. Rather, when Christ died in our place, "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51). God has removed forever the barrier He had once placed between Himself and humanity.

When Tenney wrote his book, he probably took for granted that we his readers would already understand this glorious news of the gospel. His call to repentance is not, I presume, a pre-salvation call, but rather one he believes to be necessary as part of the church's maturing in its faith. It was thus an unwise choice, I believe, to draw (without clarification) from Old Testament stories imagery to communicate concepts that apply to specifically our New Testament world.

Even if we grant, however, that Tenney did not intend to violate the message of scripture concerning redemption, we must nevertheless ask whether he is right in his insistence that our ongoing relationship with Christ is so very dependant on our actions of repentance and brokenness. Consider the following.

We all think we've known God and we all think we've been part of the Church. But we need to look closely at John. This was the apostle who personally leaned on the breast of Jesus. He was the closest disciple....Yet this same apostle turned around on the island of Patmos and *saw Him* in His unveiled glory for the first time....The scriptures say that John fell at the Lord's feet as though he were dead (see Rev. 1:17)....In the visionary instant that John saw Him, he tasted death because he had seen life. It takes death to really see Him, and all I can say is, "It's a good day to die." The more I die, the closer He gets. (62,63)

If we read over this quickly, we might miss the sleight of hand that Tenney seems to perform. The Bible says that *when* John saw Jesus, *then* he fell at His feet as dead. But the point that Tenney so badly wants us to accept is that *if* we can manage to die, *then* we will see the glory of God.

What does the Bible actually teach? Paul took great pains to explain this matter to the church in Rome.

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3,4)

In other words, we who are truly born into and now live in the kingdom of God have "passed from death to life" (I John 3:14) *because* God looks at us through the lens of the blood of His Son. Tenney may be right when he says, "The more death that God smells, the closer He can come" (60), but that would only be true if he were talking about the death of Jesus. Repeating an earlier quotation, this does not seem to be his intention.

So when we beg for God to come close, He will, but He also says, "I can't really get any closer, because if I do, your flesh will be destroyed. I want you to understand that if you will just go ahead and die, then I can come near to you." (60)

Tenney is wrong. Far from our needing to die, or even to drastically repent, God has made complete provision through the death and resurrection of His Son for "all things that pertain to life *and* godliness." (II Peter 1:3) In other words, He not only gives eternal life in our salvation, He Himself also brings us to holiness by His power, not ours. Let's frame the above phrase with more of what Peter wrote.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue. (II Peter 1:2,3)

Can you see that from Peter's point of view (which I think we should trust), our increased godliness comes precisely in proportion to our knowledge of Jesus? It really fits the idea of repentance better, I think. The more we know about who Jesus is (both through scripture and through His work in our lives), the more clearly we perceive our need for the cleansing work of His Spirit. It is in this context that repentance has real meaning, and real results.

It becomes a cycle, actually: revelation, repentance, "conversion" (changed behavior), and then more revelation. Peter doesn't suggest however that it happens without any effort on our part. He goes on to say,

But also for this very reason giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (II Peter 1:5-8)

How wonderful it would be if the passion and energy being expressed by this generation could be directed by these words of Peter! Rather than focusing on some kind of nebulous death to self, the Bible calls each of us to a life filled with faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, and so forth. Moreover, the point of all this effort is not so much its effect on us (although we will be changed). Rather, God is calling us to be fruitful, which means that as His grace becomes more a part of our nature, others will be drawn to and transformed by His love as well.

A Matter of Ministry

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift....And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.
(Ephesians 4:7,11,12)

One of the more unusual components of Tenney's theology as it's presented in *The God Chasers* is his understanding of how God desires to evangelize our world. We mentioned earlier his strong disillusionment with traditional church ministry. Let's look at a couple of his colorful descriptions.

The modern Church is a caretaker or a maintenance organization at best, and a museum of what once was, at worst. Our greatest problem is that we've "stocked our shelves" with the wrong stuff....Empty religious ritual is as unappetizing as "blue mashed potatoes" or some other unnatural concoction. If anybody could ever open a store that just dispenses Jesus, the hungry masses would come. (68)

I believe that God will literally destroy the Church *as we know it* if He has to so He can reach the cities. He is not in love with our imperfect versions of His perfect Church; He is only out to claim the house that *God built*. If our foul-smelling, man-made monstrosity stands in the way of what He wants to do, then He will move our junk pile aside to reach the hungry. (46)

Those of us who have grown up in church, as Tenney himself did, understand that there are real places of mediocrity and even artificiality in most contemporary services. All of us would love to see stronger body life, greater spiritual depth, more authentic love and more effective outreach in our churches. It isn't hard to put our finger on things that need to be different. However, what Tenney is proposing in his theological system is not a matter of shoring up weak pillars or even changing a few walls. His vision pretty much blasts out the foundation itself.

As we've studied in the previous chapters, Tenney is convinced that the "bread" needed by the hungry masses (both within and outside the church) is the very presence of Almighty God. As he sees it, this presence is utterly supernatural, capable of manifesting itself in rather astonishing demonstrations of power, and able to impact even the worst sinner or skeptic who happens to be nearby.

What is radical about Tenney's position is not his persuasion that such a manifestation of God's presence is real, or that it profoundly affects people. The radical step he has taken, and he believes this very strongly, is that God has finally decided (for whatever reason) to throw out the plan for church ministry that He established in His Word and which He has maintained throughout the centuries, and is about to do something new.

Again, the best way to make this point clear is to hold what Tenney writes side by side with scripture. Because the emphasis in *The God Chasers* is on evangelism, we will focus on that as well; however, I suspect that other ministries of the church would be similarly redefined. We'll begin with a passage cited earlier.

When the glory of God comes, we become like the prophet Isaiah. Our flesh is so weakened by His presence that it is unnecessary for man to do anything other than behold Him in His

glory. I've come to the conclusion that, in His presence, I am a man without a vocation. There's no need for me to preach if God shows up in His glory. The people are already convicted of His holiness simply by His presence. Simultaneously they are convicted of their unholiness and their need to repent and live holy before Him. (44)

If we allow God to replace our programs with His manifested presence, then whenever people walk through the doors of our local church building or when they mingle with us at the mall, they will be convicted of sin and could rush to get right with God without a word being spoken. (46)

Do you know what will instantly integrate someone directly into the fabric of the local church? It will happen the moment they taste the bread of His presence in that place. (25)

There are many scriptures that come to mind which contrast sharply with his paradigm. Let's consider Christ's commission to His disciples just prior to His return to heaven.

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Here we see Jesus' firm statement that His presence would be with them (and with us) from that day until the "end of the age." He did not indicate that His presence would in any fashion reduce the need for *them* to go, to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach. In Mark's version there is the additional clarification that the gospel itself must be preached (see Mark 16:15). Clearly Jesus entrusted the building of His kingdom on earth to these mortal men, whom He knew would soon be empowered by His immortal Spirit.

There's no doubt however that in those days, and in the years that followed, the efforts of believers to bring God's kingdom to earth could be seen as frustratingly weak. Millions of people lived and died, having never embraced (or even heard) the gospel. Sometimes for entire centuries the church appeared to be all but extinct. Yet we have no evidence that God has ever been ready to modify His basic plan, which was that we His children would be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world." (Matthew 5:13,14)

We need to look carefully at a couple scriptures Tenney has given us to validate his position.

And when people would enter our houses of bread, no one would have to tell them to "bow their heads in prayer." They would fall on their faces before our holy God without a single word being spoken. Even the heathen would instinctively know that God Himself had entered the house. (24)

Tenney footnotes this paragraph with a reference to I Corinthians 14:25. I will, however, add verse 24 as well.

But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

The discussion Paul was having with the Corinthians in this entire chapter concerned the public use of spiritual giftings (including tongues and prophecy) in such a way that they would edify both the church and those seekers who might come into their midst. Paul knew that while the dramatic nature of spiritual giftings would have some impact, it was the clarity of their verbal message that was most valuable. The idea of seeking signs of any sort without an accompanying explanation would have made no sense to him. He understood that it was the impact of the truth (the revealed secrets of the heart) which convinced unbelievers that God was “truly among” them.

Tenney’s other scripture reference is quite different. This time he takes us to the country of the Gadarenes, where Jesus encounters a demon-possessed man.

When the sole of Jesus’ foot touched the sandy shore of Gadara, one half-mile distant a man possessed of 5,000 demons suddenly was freed from their choking grasp for the first time. “Why? How do you know?” Mark tells us that when the demonized man saw Jesus, he ran to worship Him. Up until that precise moment, the demons had told him where to go and what to do at every other instance. (114)

Let’s look at the passage a little more carefully.

When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. And he cried out with a loud voice and said, “What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me.” For He said to him, “Come out of the man, unclean spirit!” (Mark 5:6-8)

The story continues with a negotiation between Jesus and this evil spirit to allow him (them) to move from the man into a herd of swine. When Jesus consented, the spirit(s) entered some 2,000 pigs and promptly drowned them in the sea.

Two points can be made. First, I think it’s very reasonable to suggest that it wasn’t the man but the demon who was worshipping Jesus. This spirit clearly knew who Jesus was. The word for worship means to bow down or cast oneself before someone. Until the demon left him, we have no evidence that the man had any control of his own activities. It was only later that he was said to be “in his right mind” (verse 15). At the time of the conversation in verses 6-8, the demon was still in the man’s body. It may have been that he hoped by the act of worship to somehow improve his chances of being relocated to the swine.

Second, the demon never left until Jesus clearly spoke to him. It’s true that he detected His presence from a distance. But he was bound to leave only in obedience to Jesus’ verbal instructions. Luke describes a similar instance with a demon-possessed man in the synagogue.

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him. Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, “What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.” (Luke 4:35,36)

This is quite different from what Tenney envisions.

All it takes is *one footstep* of Almighty God in a city to break the chains of decades and centuries of demonic dominion. (115)

I tell you with every ounce of faith in my being that if the Father of us all can step down and allow His manifested presence to touch earth *just once*....If even one tiny tear from His eye can fall in a city like Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago, then the flood of glory it will spawn will bring revival throughout the land as demons flee and sinners fall to their knees! (116)

I am willing to agree that when Christ returns to earth to claim His kingdom, the scenario that will ensue will be even more dramatic than this. However, we should realize that about 2,000 years ago Almighty God did step His foot onto earth, and did cry many tears....and very few of us even recognized Him. He did not really intend to make Himself known to everyone then.

It seems to me that Tenney's enthusiasm in offering this "better plan" of evangelism comes out of the disappointments of his own experience. He would probably also have voted to call down the "twelve legions of angels" which Jesus told Peter He had at His disposal when He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. Tenney, like Peter, cannot understand why God allows evil to continue without heavenly intervention.

Notice Jesus' explanation to Peter concerning why He chose not to resist the angry crowd, either with human defense or with divine. "How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" (Matthew 26:54) Because people like Tenney have allowed themselves to drift away from the Bible, they risk missing the deeper, albeit sometimes more mysterious, purposes of God on earth. As we quoted in an earlier chapter, "It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." (I Corinthians 1:21) God knew from the outset that His ways would not match up with human reasoning.

Is Tenney mistaken in his dissatisfaction with the ineffectiveness of the contemporary church? Not at all. However, the solution is not to throw out human ministers. Rather, we should reevaluate how well we are conforming to the biblical pattern of ministry. Consider these words of Paul:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (I Corinthians 2:1-5)

Here we see that divine combination of our own fumbling words with the supernatural manifestation of God's power that Jesus described when He commissioned His disciples to go into the world.

And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.

And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. (Mark 16:17,18,20)

Tenney is right; we do need God's presence. But we need it *in us*, to empower us to preach and to demonstrate the truth of His word, His wisdom, and His glorious purposes on earth.

A Matter of Worship

“Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the Lord. (Jeremiah 9:24)

Worship is dear to the hearts of today’s believers, particularly those in charismatic congregations. Many see it as a key, if not *the* key, to spiritual renewal and empowerment. Tenney seems to share this persuasion, although as we have seen he defines worship to include more than simply artistic expression (singing, dancing, etc.), extending it to incorporate other acts of repentance and brokenness.

On page 125 of *The God Chasers*, we find three paragraphs which represent three diverse components of Tenney’s theology of worship. I would like to consider each of them individually. Paragraph number one says,

I’m not writing this because you and the many others who will read these words don’t know God’s Word. On the contrary, I’m saying this because the Lord wants to develop a new level of intimacy with *His people*. He doesn’t want us to memorize Bible trivia; He wants us *to know Him*. Paul said that before he was converted to Christ, he understood the law. But after he was converted, he said, “*I know whom I have believed*” (2 Tim. 1:12b). It’s one thing to know *about* Him; it’s quite another to know Him.

What does it mean to know Christ? Tenney is right that it is more than just knowing facts about Him. It’s also true that intimate knowledge of Jesus can only come after His Spirit makes our spirit alive. However, the “knowing” that Paul refers to in his letter to Timothy goes much deeper than the experience of conversion. Paul is near death, and he wants his younger disciple to understand what he has discovered over years of walking through hardship, sustained by the grace of God.

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. (II Timothy 1:12)

In the midst of persecution Paul came to an experiential knowledge of the faithfulness of his Lord. His next comment, however, was that what he had learned about Christ should be passed on to others through verbal testimony.

Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. (II Timothy 1:13)

Knowing Christ includes knowing His instructions. John puts this principle even more bluntly.

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. (I John 1:3-5)

What does this have to do with worship? Well, let’s look at paragraph two.

God is calling you to a new level of intimacy. If you dare to answer His call, the Lord will reveal a fresh part of His character. He will pull you so close that you will be breathing the very rarefied air of Heaven. The only way to the place David called “the secret place” is through the door of focused worship, when you lay aside every distraction and focus your body, soul, and spirit upon God. When His presence becomes so strong that you are oblivious to everyone and everything else around you, then healing can come in an encounter with God from which you will never “recover.” Your heart will be as permanently disabled with love as Jacob’s leg was left with a limp!

Here we see how definitively Tenney separates the worship experience from the external world. In an exercise that sounds not unlike eastern meditation, he encourages the worshipper to abandon awareness of the congregation of believers and “focus your body, soul, and spirit upon God.” He does not, however, direct our attention to the known attributes of God that might be contained in scripture or hymns. Rather, we are charged to wait for new revelation, a “fresh part of God’s character,” that will presumably be life-changing.

As we’ve seen in the preceding chapters, this process runs counter to the heart of scripture. Jesus Himself indicates that knowing God is integrally connected to knowing His words.

For I have given them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me....Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth....I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word. (John 17:8,17,20)

Interestingly, paragraph three provides an excellent demonstration of what happens when the first two paragraphs are put into practice.

I was launched on this journey when God spoke to me while in the midst of His presence. He said, “*Son, the services that you consider your favorite services and those I favor are not the same services.*” That is when I realized that we often come to church to “get something” from God, when the Bible tells us over and over again to “minister unto the Lord.” Yes, we’re involved in ministry all right. Our lives are so filled with ministry to people and the needs of people that we very seldom enter into a place where we can minister to Him. We go away week after week self-gratified, with our itches scratched and our narrow personal needs met. When will we hear God’s still small voice saying, “Would somebody just love *Me?*”

When I checked into Tenney’s claim that the Bible says “over and over again” to minister unto the Lord, I found that this expression was applied exclusively to the ritual duties of the Old Testament priests. It is never mentioned in the New Testament. There we read the opposite:

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

Consider too the ministry that God *does* desire from His people.

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, “Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?”...And the King will answer and say to them,

“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.” (Matthew 25:37,40)

For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. (Hebrews 6:10)

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (I Peter 4:10)

Not only does Tenney’s “fresh revelation” contradict God’s definition of ministry, it is also drastically inconsistent with His character.

The bottom line is this: If you are really hungry to see Daddy come on the scene, then you have to understand that you must stop seeking His benefits and quit asking for Him to do this and that. We have managed to turn what we erroneously call “church” into a big “bless me club” where we sign up for this blessing and that blessing. I’m not so sure that we need to seek blessings anymore. (116)

How very different this is from the God of the Bible. There we find a God who delights in being our protector and provider.

Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. (II Chronicles 16:8,9)

Far from the lonely, needy God that Tenney seems to have discovered, one who resents petitions, Jesus describes His Father as being glorified when we come to Him with our requests.

And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. (John 14:13,14)

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you....If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! (Matthew 7:7,11)

It is of course possible, as James 4:3 points out, to “ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (*hedone*, or lusts). But the solution to this is *not* to stop asking, but simply to limit our requests to those things that God does approve of, either our own legitimate needs, or else things that would benefit others. As we described above, God’s greatest longing is not that we spend our affections on Him in what Tenney calls “private passion” (133), but that we diligently serve one another in His name.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:7,8)

When Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him, and when Peter assured Him that he did, Jesus did not suggest that Peter prove his love through a hug or a song. All three times His response was, “Take care of My sheep.” (John 21:15-17)

From this perspective, then, we find ourselves with quite a different definition of worship. Jesus once quoted to the priests and scribes this expression from the Psalms:

“Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise.” (Matthew 21:16)

My experience of babes is that their primary cries are to communicate needs, and any sounds of pleasure that might follow those cries are directly related to those needs having been met. God continuously describes Himself as a father, or even sometimes a mother, who thrills at meeting the needs of His children.

However, just as a parent finds even greater joy when they see their children begin to grow into adulthood with a servant’s heart toward others, so God also gains pleasure when our lives begin to reflect His goodness in such a way that others are affected as well. Jesus taught the multitudes,

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

The only way to understand how someone else (especially one who does not know God) might see *my* good works and not glorify *me*, but glorify God instead, is to realize what Jesus means by the word “glorify.” From His view, the Father gains glory when others begin to change as a result of how I live. Those who see me may (because of my example) simply begin to adjust their behavior so that it is more conformed to His righteous ways. But even better, they may be drawn to seek the source of my good works, which is the Spirit of God Himself.

Is there a place for worship as the church has more traditionally defined it? Of course. Let’s consider this passage from Colossians.

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:15-17)

Here we see a group of believers wonderfully focused on both the wisdom and the goodness of God. They communicate to Him through thanksgiving their gratitude for what He has done, and they communicate to each other through “teaching and admonition” the insights they have discovered in their walk with Christ.

Music and other artistic expression can be a perfect vehicle for this worship. However, the expression (however skillful) should never be an end in itself. Rather, when worship is properly engaged in, its result should always be that the worshipper is brought to a greater delight in the nature of God, and also to a deeper understanding of His ways.

A Matter of Intimacy

And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one; I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (John 17:22,23)

At various points in *The God Chasers*, Tenney seeks to communicate his understanding of intimacy with God by painting a picture of the relationship between a father and his child. Consider these two passages.

God is everywhere, but *He doesn't turn His face and His favor everywhere*. That is why He tells us to seek His face. Yes, He is present with you every time you meet with other believers in a worship service, but how long has it been since your hunger caused you to crawl up in His lap, and like a child, to reach up and take the face of God to turn it toward you? Intimacy with Him! That is what God desires, and His face should be our highest focus. (38)

The difference between the anointing and the glory is the difference between God's hands and His face, and the path to the glory of God takes us right up to the altar where we must lay everything down and die. In the end, we will find ourselves face to face with God as a nation of "dead men walking," in possession of His glory. Nothing else is needed; nothing else is necessary. Once God's children lay down their toys and crawl into the Father's lap to seek His face, the House of Bread will once again overflow with fresh bread and every good gift. *The hungry will find the eternal satisfaction that they've always longed for.* (151)

The first thing that strikes me about these descriptions is that they assume a strong discontentment with what we now have. Yes, God is there in our worship services, but that's not enough. His hands do provide for us, but we are not quite satisfied. Tenney is calling us to a "chase," a quest for something more, something we desire so intensely that we, like a child, want somehow to "turn" the face of God so His attention might be more fully directed toward us.

Does God really find this kind of pursuit enticing? Is our hunger for greater intimacy legitimate? In Psalm 63, we see David crying out for the Lord.

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (verse 1, NIV)

David is in the wilderness, and undoubtedly has a real need for the blessing of God. But notice this: for David, the "chase" is over as soon as it starts. Rather than longing for something he's never known, he recalls instead the sufficiency of God which he has apparently felt many times before.

I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. (verses 2-5)

On the cover of his book, Tenney quotes verse 8 of this psalm: "My soul follows hard after

Thee.” This translation of course portrays David (or us) as desperately pursuing God. However, the verb *dabaq* is also often translated “to cleave” rather than to “follow hard after.” The New International Version renders it “stay close to.” Let’s look at it in context.

On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. I stay close to you; your right hand upholds me. (verses 6-8)

This is not a picture of emptiness, but of fullness, of safety. It appears that David’s cry for the closeness of God comes not from an undefined longing, but from the memories of his actual experience of God’s divine presence.

Thus part of our hunger may come because we have neglected to find contentment in the provisions God has already made. As we discussed in chapter five, God *has given us all things* necessary for life and godliness (II Peter 1:3). Even though we may have tangible hardships and poverty, we can learn to say with Paul,

Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:12,13)

If we have not yet reached this measure of peace, it may not be so much God’s withholding of His presence as it is our own inability to perceive and rest in the grace He gives.

There is, I think, an additional area of wrong thinking implied in Tenney’s call to higher levels of intimacy. In a paragraph quoted at the beginning of this chapter, he makes the claim that, “The hungry will find the eternal satisfaction that they’ve always longed for.” Elsewhere he states,

The death of genuine repentance and brokenness before God will allow Him to draw near to you. The apostle Paul said, “For now we see through a glass darkly; but then *face to face*: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Cor. 13:12). At that point we will know God in the full measure of who He is, the way He knows us in the full measure of who we are....Are you avoiding death? Do you want God’s blessings on your life? The greatest blessing doesn’t come from God’s hand; it comes from His face in intimate relationship. When you finally see Him and know Him, you have come to the source of all power. (62,63)

Perhaps the problem is already clear to you just from reading these passages. What Tenney is doing is blurring what God offers us in *this* lifetime with what He promises to give us in heaven. There is absolutely no doubt that we will move into an indescribable relationship with our Savior once we are free from the prison of our earthly, sin-tainted flesh. As Paul tells the Philippians,

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20,21)

In other words, there is a sense in which the longing we feel for “something more” is, and *should be*, one of the most powerful urges in our beings. We as the future bride of Christ are

betrothed to the most wonderful Lover that ever will exist. But like a young woman awaiting her wedding day, we must learn to treasure this part of our desires as something that cannot yet be filled. It is quite wrong for anyone to suggest that we might prematurely find “eternal satisfaction” before the appointed time.

I’d like to discuss another aspect of intimacy that doesn’t really receive much mention in *The God Chasers*, but which I believe will help us to better understand it from God’s viewpoint. It is not accidental that throughout scripture, *suffering* plays an essential role in our fellowship with God. We need to look at this from three different angles. First, I want to consider how suffering actually draws us to Christ. Second, I want to show that we are able to know Him more fully through sufferings. And third, I believe that a willingness to suffer for Him will in fact be the result of true intimacy with Him.

In my introduction I quoted a well-known passage from Jeremiah.

Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:12-13)

Here God is asking His people to pursue Him with great passion. But look at the circumstances God designed to motivate their search.

I will be found of you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I caused you to be carried away captive. (Jeremiah 29:14)

Can you see that God deliberately sent His people to be slaves in a foreign land, in order that they might develop a deep longing to return to the God they once knew?

Consider another familiar promise.

...if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (II Chronicles 7:14)

Let’s back up a verse.

When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people...

God desires that we make His will our priority, and that we learn to draw on His strength. When we turn from this close relationship with Him to our own “wicked ways,” the Bible indicates that God will bring us pain in order to draw us back. As the writer of Hebrews exhorts,

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. (Hebrews 12:5,6)

But even after we learn to walk in fellowship with God, suffering still remains the portion of every believer. Peter describes it in this fashion.

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (I Peter 4:12-14)

Paul too expressed a deep desire to "know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings." (Philippians 3:10) It seems that these saints who walked intimately with God understood that it is in the crucible of distress that His presence and love are most clearly felt. They had tapped into the mysterious joy of fully relying on His grace.

Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (II Corinthians 12:9,10)

Finally, suffering is an integral part of our service to God. But this is I think quite different from what Tenney has in mind when he speaks of our need to "lay everything down and die." (151)

I have feebly tried to explain the unexplainable, but all I know is this: "*The more I die, the closer God gets.*" I don't know how much of God you know or have, but He will reveal *more* of Himself to you if you are willing to die to yourself. Paul the Apostle said he knew a man (himself) who was caught up into the third heaven in Second Corinthians 12:2. This apostle didn't merely know "about" God; he *knew God*. How did he gain that intimate knowledge? He said, "I die daily" (see 1 Cor. 15:31). (148)

Note first that Paul's experience in the "third heaven" took place some fourteen years *before* he wrote his letters to the Corinthians, and well before the ministry he describes in I Corinthians 15. Again, his dying came after, not before, his encounter with God.

But more than that, Paul's "dying" is not merely a denial of his own interests or desires, but instead a willingness to radically risk his life on a daily basis. As he put it, "We stand in jeopardy every hour." (I Corinthians 15:30)

Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness...[and notice this especially]...besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. (II Corinthians 11:25-28)

Here is a picture of the kind of death to which we are truly called. While few of us are likely to match Paul's list of tribulations, it is clear that we too must be ready to embrace physical suffering.

Because Paul cared so deeply for those whom he'd led to Christ, his concern for them was in some ways the most significant suffering of all. It is hard for me to contemplate intimacy without seeing a profound unity of heart and purpose in those who are intimate. The bond of love that is possible between us and our Lord must include sharing in His passion to care for those who are

“harassed and helpless” (Matthew 9:36, NIV).

Intimacy with God is thus far more than just the mutual delight of a father and his child. Rather, as we grow in grace and in conformity to His image, we become supernaturally bonded to Christ, like a “branch to a vine” (John 15:5). In this way, the very life of Christ flows through us into the world, bearing much fruit, and bringing lasting glory to the Father.

Destiny or Delusion?

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

*And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.
(II Thessalonians 2:9-12)*

Several months ago our Sunday School teacher posed this question to our class: “How many of you are currently being deceived? Please raise your hands.” We all responded quite properly by keeping our hands down. Deception is by definition invisible to its victim.

To be sure, most of us know what deception looks like. We can see it by looking back at situations in our past. We can see it pretty clearly in our neighbor. The Bible mentions many common sources of deception: riches (Mark 4:19), lusts (Ephesians 4:22), worldly philosophies (Colossians 2:8), and sin in general (Hebrews 3:13). As we grow in Christ, we become more and more aware of our human vulnerability to these forces, and we learn to draw on His grace in defense against them.

In his second letter to the Thessalonians, however, Paul speaks of a different kind of deception, a “strong delusion” that God Himself will send in the end times. This deception will be accompanied by “power, signs, and lying wonders.” Christ described this period as well, warning

For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:24)

While I don’t know that we are in this season quite yet, I am persuaded that the contemporary church needs to be far more wise than we are about what this level of deception might be like. Paul indicates that Satan won’t come around wearing horns and carrying a pitchfork, but instead will be an “angel of light,” and his servants will be “ministers of righteousness.” (II Corinthians 11:14,15) In the same way, the message they bring will not appear to have anything to do with sin; on the contrary, it will look and *feel* entirely holy.

The realization of how dangerous all this would be was on Paul’s mind in the very last instructions he wrote before he died. I’d like to quote what he told Timothy in its entirety, because in it he provides the key to our protection from deception. Please read it carefully.

But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of

season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from truth, and be turned aside to fables. (II Timothy 4:13-5:4)

Can you see that this reflects the issues we've been considering throughout our discussion? When experience is allowed to govern our choice of what to believe, we have no defense against being "turned aside to fables" by our own desires. Only the eternal Holy Scriptures can make us secure from a deception that is so powerful it could almost deceive the "elect" of God. Once someone is lured into the whirlpool of this kind of deception, it's very difficult to escape. Because it will look so much like the real, the person will be completely unaware of what's happening until they have lost all sight of the horizon of biblical truth.

It is important to realize that signs and wonders can accompany both ministers of God and ministers of Satan, and thus they alone are not a sufficient basis for deciding what is true. When John the Baptist sent messengers from prison to inquire whether Jesus was the Christ, Jesus responded

Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. (Luke 7:22)

He clearly chose to validate His ministry by the works He performed, but He also tied them to the message He preached.

Let's look too at the experience of Paul and Barnabas. They were in Asia, "speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands." (Acts 14:3) But when they came to Lystra and healed a crippled man, the people responded in a rather unexpected fashion.

Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. (Acts 14:11,12)

Paul and Barnabas were horrified, and quickly tried to explain the truth of the situation to these passion-crazed people. However, we are told that they could "scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them." (verse 18)

Yet in the next verse we find that these same people were later swayed by a group of the Jews who opposed Paul's ministry. They stopped their sacrificing, picked up some rocks, and "stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead."

You see, their encounter with the miraculous affected them on an experiential level only. They were not interested in the message these men were bringing to them, and thus could move from worship to murder without contradiction. Yet some of the people in Lystra did hear the word, for on his return trip to the city, we are told that Paul "strengthened the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith." (verse 21)

What is the best way to respond to miraculous experiences? Perhaps we should listen to the testimony of a man who witnessed one of the most powerful manifestations of God's presence

recorded in scripture. Peter was one of three select disciples who were permitted to see the transfiguration of Christ.

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. (Matthew 17:1-8)

At the time, Peter was clueless about the significance of this astonishing event. But much later in his life, we find he had come to realize its importance.

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (II Peter 1:16-21)

You see, Peter now understood that their encounter with God that day was not an end in itself, nor was it intended to encourage him and his friends to spend more time on high mountains. In fact, Jesus immediately took His disciples back into the valleys of life, and told them to say nothing to anyone about what they had seen until after He had risen from the dead (Matthew 17:9). Nor could God's manifestation of His presence and His honoring of His Son be interpreted as a call to worship. Peter's suggestion that they build tabernacles was completely ignored.

Rather, God chose to reveal Himself in this way so that Peter and his friends *would know without a doubt that the scriptures were true*. The New International Version translates the first part of verse 19, "We have the words of the prophets made more certain." Jesus wished to give the disciples a burning memory that would absolutely convince them that He was who He said He was, and that His life on earth was the fulfillment of scriptural prophecy. He knew they'd need that certainty to carry them through the intense tribulations they would face after His return to heaven.

* * * * *

Let's consider now the supernatural event which so affected Tommy Tenney. As you recall if you have read *The God Chasers*, Tenney was the guest speaker one Sunday at a church in Houston which his friend pastored, and he had been requested to return the following Sunday.

As I walked in to sit down in the front row that morning, the presence of God was already in that place so heavily that the air was "thick." You could barely breathe. The musicians were clearly struggling to continue their music; their tears got in the way. Music became more difficult to play. Finally, the presence of God hovered so strongly that they couldn't sing or play any longer. The worship leader crumpled in sobs behind the keyboard. (5)

As minutes passed, Tenney and the pastor groped about for the appropriate thing to do. Finally the pastor stepped to the pulpit to deliver what he felt the Lord desired to say to the congregation. First he read II Chronicles 7:14.

Then he closed his Bible, gripped the edges of the pulpit with trembling hands, and said, "The word of the Lord to us is to stop seeking His benefits and to seek Him. We are not to seek His hands any longer, but seek His face."

In that instant, I heard what sounded like a thunderclap echo through the building, and the pastor was literally picked up and thrown backward about ten feet, effectively separating him from the pulpit. When he went backward, the pulpit fell forward. The beautiful flower arrangement positioned in front of it fell to the ground, but by the time the pulpit hit the ground, it was already in two pieces. It had split into two pieces almost as if lightning had hit it! At that instant the tangible terror of the presence of God filled that room. (7)

Tenney continues with a description of the intense wave of repentance that swept through the audience. The "pure pandemonium" (8) lasted for many hours, and included seven altar calls and a lengthy baptismal service. In fact, the desire of the people to "repent and receive Christ, worship, wait, and pray" (12) continued every night of the week for over a month.

Because I did not witness these events, I must trust that Tenney has provided us with an accurate description...which I am entirely willing to do. I am also very willing to believe that the repentance of this congregation was real, and that it produced lasting changes in the hearts and lives of many individuals.

It is interesting to notice, however, that (unless he has withheld something from us) Tenney himself was not among the repentant. He seemed to be more of an on-the-scene reporter, stepping to the microphone to instruct the congregation, "In case you aren't aware, God has just moved into this place. The pastor is fine." (7) His more extensive response of course is the subject of his book. He becomes an analyst, interpreting what he believes God wished to communicate through the manifestation of power this church had witnessed.

Tenney seems comfortable in assuming this position of expertise, partly because of his training and authority as a pastor, and partly because (as he tells us) he had felt just prior to these events something he called "a divine depression of destiny." (2) Nevertheless, as we have discussed, it is possible that his interpretations may not be entirely aligned with what Paul termed "sound doctrine."

I have no doubt that Tenney is unaware of these discrepancies. I also believe him to be a man of compassion, who is acutely conscious of the spiritual longings of today's church community. Therefore, I'm not accusing Tenney of being a false teacher, much less a minister of Satan. I do

believe however that to the extent he has disregarded the precise teachings of scripture, he has wandered into areas of untruth for which God will hold him accountable.

My greater concern, however, is for the apparently large numbers of people who have so eagerly embraced his book. You see, the real foundation for what it teaches is not the Bible, but someone's experience. In many cases, the readers themselves may have witnessed their own "Houston" miracles, and may see *The God Chasers* as a kind of instruction manual on what it all means and how to respond.

To these people, I hope what I have written will come as a word of caution. There are no human experts (not Tenney, not me, not anyone). The Spirit of truth is the only reliable interpreter, because the manifestations of God's power are ultimately His own workings.

It's not insignificant that in spite of his expressed confidence, Tenney is not really certain of what he is promoting. Notice what he writes in his first chapter.

That Sunday we seemed to come so close; we almost caught Him. Now I know it's possible.
(10)

No, he doesn't *know* that. He simply believes it with all his heart. He closes his book with this picture.

He will not frustrate us. God will allow Himself to be caught by us. As a father playing tag with his child allows himself to be caught by the laughing, loving child, so too will the heavenly Father allow Himself to be caught. In fact, just when you would tire in despair, He will turn and catch you. He wants to be "captured" by our love. He eagerly awaits the laughing, loving encounter. He has missed those times with man since the Garden. Intuitively, God chasers have known this. *They were willing to chase the "uncatchable," knowing the "impossible" would catch them.* In fact, one famous God chaser wrote this:

I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12b). Paul caught Him! So can you! Come join the company of God chasers! The chase is on... (151)

Taking one last look at scripture, we see that Paul did not actually say he wished to apprehend *God*; instead, he desired that "by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (verse 11). Tenney thus leaves his readers with a *strongly felt*, but *verbally undefined*, goal...and one that doesn't really have any biblical basis. In other words, not only did he not quite "catch" God, he really can't tell us what it would be like if we did.

Dear reader, please be warned. Our culture has been flooded with the notion that our feelings are our best guide, but this is far from the counsel of scripture. I strongly believe God wishes to call us back to our senses, and to the love of *His* truth, before it is too late.