

Lifebyte 64

It's Time For Followers of Jesus To Live Repentantly—Part 7

Does Your Marriage Reflect Your Covenant With Our Father? (Lesson 4)

"Thanks be to God, Who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." (2 Corinthians 2:14,15)

Sanctify Your Marriage Into Christ's Likeness — Repent! and Stay Repentant!!!



**Turn away from sin
and strongholds**



**Turn to Jesus and
become like Him**

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

(Ephesians 5:25-27)



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**“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out,
that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19)**

Hurdle 5: The *mutual support* needed to remain in fellowship with your Father and to grow in Christ’s likeness.



Introduction

“I pray not only for these, but also for those who will trust in Me because of their word, that they may all be one. Just as You, Father, are united with Me and I with You, I pray that they may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me”
(John 17:20,21).

We’ve noted elsewhere that most of the commands in the Newer Testament were written in a *plural* context rather than singularly to an individual. That’s because our Father intends that His good and righteous commands for His people be *applied collectively* even as each person sets his or her heart on responsive obedience in their own life.

Whether as a married couple or even within the extended family of your home fellowship, your pilgrimage to your salvation is to be *worked out together*:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you [plural] have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my

absence — continue to work out your [plural] salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you [plural] to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:12,13).

The plural references Paul makes to his beloved in Jesus are intentionally collective. He wants them to recognize God at work in them as an *interconnected body* as they respond to His will and purpose. The apostle also reminds them of the *awesomeness* of the God they’re serving as they proceed together on their journey to salvation. It’s through their *mutual support* as family in Christ that they enact the “one-another” commands.

One of the delights of the Older Testament is that it moves from what seems to be a very confined context to applications on a larger scale through *rhema* of the Holy Spirit. Consider this verse: “Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together” (Deuteronomy 22:10). There would be a whole lot of crooked rows as well as irritated, straining animals with this kind of mismatched team, never mind an exhausted plowman trying to keep them at the same speed!



Now reread this verse in light of your marriage and/or your fellowship family *as a team*. Your Covenant in Jesus with your Father as well as your covenant with your marriage partner are *heart matters of determination* to live in union with both God and your spouse. An intricate

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link between these two covenants has wonderful biblical purpose: that your ongoing sanctification into Christ’s likeness in your marriage *brings glory* to Lord Jesus and to your heavenly Father.

This glorious growth won’t take place, though, if you’re “unequally yoked”. Paul warns the followers of Jesus in Corinth that there can be no true fellowship between one whose heart is set on living for Jesus in righteous obedience and one who is pursuing lawlessness and disregarding God’s ways (2 Corinthians 6:14). Only struggle and division will come from a union like this, bringing strain and unrest in its wake like crooked rows in a field.

Neither can a fellowship family spur each other on in Christ’s likeness if they are united with those who live to please themselves through *worldly compromise*. You can’t mutually support one another in response to the Holy Spirit if part of your fellowship either ignores Him or doesn’t have Him at all (1 Corinthians 2:12-14)!

A significant privilege of a fellowship family is to come alongside one another with the freedom in Spirit to strengthen and speak into each other’s lives. Married couples in particular *need this support* to help them deepen their covenant union together. The enemy of our soul is intent on destroying covenant unions that might produce godly offspring, so your fellowship family is a vital link in helping you both resolve differences as well as press on as a couple that brings Him glory. That can’t happen if your fellowship family is unequally yoked according to our Father’s purposes for biblical fellowship.

Compare the purposes for *your* fellowship gathering as family in Christ, and the purposes for which our Father brings family in Jesus together:

1. Your fellowship with others must spur you on to **glorify our Father and Jesus** through praise, worship, and living testimony (1 Corinthians 10:31).
2. Your fellowship with each other must support your **growth in Christ-likeness** (see Philippians 2:12).
3. Your shared fellowship must encourage you **toward repentance and the narrow gate** (Matthew 7:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:12).
4. Your fellowship as extended spiritual family must embolden you to **reveal Jesus to the lost** in your daily life (2 Corinthians 5:18,19).

We hope that you’ve discussed **Lifebyte 62** and have rid your marriage of all vestiges of Ahab and Jezebel. And, make sure you scrutinize your fellowship for the same influences by discussing this with them. You’re not pointing accusing fingers at one another by doing this! Rather, you’re helping each other make sure your lives are *fully available* for His work in and through you to serve His purposes as His beloved children.

Your covenant union will only be successful in growing in the character of Christ as you are aligned in loving, responsive obedience with His Spirit and His Word. Then you and your fellowship family can press on together with equal commitment *“to will and to act according to His good purpose”* as you apply His commands out of love for Him and for each other.

Living on Top of the Mountain

(See the diagram on page 4)

It would seem that so few within westernized Christendom have an authentic biblical understanding of the *consequences* of their life choices. If you are wholly following Jesus in Spirit and in Truth, then you’re engaged by

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demonic forces in an ongoing and unyielding battle. You didn't choose this opposition in the unseen realm, but it began to come your way when you were born from above into Christ as the Lord of your life! Once you grasp the biblical view of spiritual warfare and what's really at stake, your perspective on everything else in your life will change.

Most of us stroll through our daily life oblivious that Satan is still at war with Jesus. Our Lord has indeed overcome the Adversary, yet the enraged enemy continues to tempt and attack those in whom the Spirit of Jesus abides. The one who deceives the world, as well as his demonic servants, are insidiously at work here on earth (Revelation 12:9). The targets against whom he makes war? Those who *keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ* (Revelation 12:17).

Satan is intent on *making war against the saints and conquering them* (Revelation 13:7). But the devil's battle is retaliation against our Lord Jesus at work in you. If he can *snatch away* the seed of the Gospel that was planted in you, all the better for his purposes (Luke 8:12). You're left thinking you're a "Christian" and are inoculated against further Spirit input.

The warnings against demonic wiles and possibility of being devoured wouldn't be written for us in God's Word if they were an impossibility. If the devil can drag away and entice *followers of Jesus* into ongoing sin that leads to spiritual death, he experiences success (James 1:14,15). If he can sever multiple marriage covenants, particularly among those who follow Jesus, he is bringing down the name of the Lord Jesus as well as shattering homes and leaving children emotionally scarred.

Satan's simple strategy against you and your spouse is to convince either or both of you to give up on Jesus. He'll try to tempt you: • to run from the battle and seek greener pastures with someone else; • to nullify your Kingdom service by compromising with the world's wicked ways and values; • to stop representing Jesus by tolerating or accepting unbiblical beliefs in your lives.

Tragically, churching couples lead this nation in divorce yet sit complacently in weekly gatherings, basking in the misguided belief that their broken covenant(s) mean nothing to God. The devil has succeeded in his delusions! So we encourage you to prayerfully pay attention to the issues we share in this Hurdle.

Top of the Mountain—Kingdom Living

A life in Lord Jesus that pleases our Father is like living on the top of a mountain. Here, your heart's desire is to abide in Covenant union with our Father and to have this union manifested in your marriage. Here, too, you pursue authentic, load-bearing fellowship with others who love our God and abide in trusting, responsive obedience through His Spirit. Through that *connectedness of His Spirit*, you're able to mutually support and encourage one another as you all serve the King in His Kingdom purposes.

Before we continue, we need to remember that *none of us* was born on top of the mountain in Covenant union with our Lord! Each of us was born into sin, a prisoner by our sin nature to the world's evil ways (Galatians 4:3,8,9). Therefore, each of us needed to be *born again* so the Spirit of Christ could bring us up to the top.

Even though our spirit is seated with Jesus in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6),

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Living In Covenant Union With Our Father: *Marriage & Fellowship*

(1) Keeping in focus what
Jesus accomplished on the cross for you.

(3) Applying His Word and
fulfilling your Kingdom purposes in Him.

Kingdom Living

(2) Relying on His power and grace in
order to abide in His Kingdom.

(4) Living in repentance, free from uncon-
fessed sin and demonic strongholds.



our *soul* still retains a sin nature that wants to give way to unrighteous desires (Romans 13:14). Any demonic strongholds that still abide in our soul will also hinder our ability to respond to the Holy Spirit.

The two evil forces in our soul are our **sin nature** and **demonic strongholds** that have not been demolished (Galatians 5:17; Romans 8:5-7). These constantly tempt us to remain *ignorant of God's commands* or to *rebel against God* (James 1:14,15; Hebrews 6:4-6).

If we remain ignorant of our God's commands, or decide to live in ongoing rebellion, we'll slip away from the mountain top (see diagram on page 9). If we continue to resist the Holy Spirit's prompting to repent, we'll give way to ongoing sin as a way of life. That path leads to reprobation and spiritual death (Romans 8:12,13).

This sobering reality is why it's so vital to *collectively understand* how to remain on the mountain and be *mutually committed* to one another in both your marriage and your fellowship family.

This is an *ongoing journey* in Covenant union with our Father as we intentionally align our lives through His Spirit in responsive obedience out of *grateful love for Him*. So, how do we come alongside one another to press on together in fruitful Kingdom living? Four essential aspects of ongoing, biblical life in the Spirit will keep your heart and mind *lifted up with Christ* out of the world's miry pit where Satan is trying to drag you down to destruction.

(1) **Keeping in focus what Jesus accomplished for you on the cross.**

Staying on top of the mountain calls for you to first take your focus *off* this world, which is Satan's domain. Then

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you can more fully realize and gratefully appreciate the immeasurable gift of LIFE Jesus has achieved for you through His death and resurrection. God’s love and His power overflowed through the work of His Son on that agonizing means of victory:

*For the **message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are [in the process of] being saved it is the power of God ... For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified** (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:2).*

No matter how intense the battle Satan wages against you, you have *already achieved victory* by what Jesus accomplished on the cross. HE has made provision to cover your sins with His atoning blood each and every time you repent! This is *grace*: Jesus paid the penalty for your sins once for all time (Hebrews 9:27,28). And, this is *victory*: If you remain in Covenant union as you complete your earthly pilgrimage, you will receive a resurrection welcome.

Please, heed this warning:

If you don’t realize the *significance of the sacrifice of Jesus and the eternal destination He offers, then you’ll only perceive Him through the lens of how He can benefit your life on earth. Your misplaced focus will lead to disillusionment, drawing you ever closer to the edge of the mountain and its precipitous sides.*

(2) Relying on His power and grace in order to abide in His Kingdom.

You can’t stay at the top of the mountain if you’re depending on your own strength and will power. Abiding in the Spirit means that you must trust in what

our Lord can do through *His grace and power* to change you and to work through you to do your part in His Kingdom. The disciple who fully tasted that power and grace wanted to make sure those in Christ who came afterward would recognize that He has set apart our lives for His purpose:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through the full knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness (2 Peter 1:3).

You are *never alone* in the spiritual battle that’s going on around you. “[Jesus] is **totally able to deliver those who approach God through Him; since He is alive forever and thus forever intercedes on their behalf**” (Hebrews 7:25). Our Lord sees you in your weakness, and His Spirit dwells within you to strengthen you to live according to God’s ways. What amazing love He has for you, one He has redeemed, a love which propels Him to intercede on your behalf!

(3) Applying His Word, and fulfilling your Kingdom purposes in Him.

So, what should be your righteous and grateful response to that which Jesus has accomplished on your behalf on the cross and *continues to do* through His intercession? Stay away from the sides of the mountain! Align your will and purpose with that of the indwelling Spirit, and *flee* from the enemy’s devices when temptation is dangled before you.

Have no doubt about this. Satan will keep on trying to lure you away from righteous living through sexual immorality, idolatry, love of money and what it’ll buy you — any number of worldly means or strongholds within you that would compromise your walk in Christ.

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Be sure you’re not swayed by pseudo-Christians who misuse our Lord’s love and grace to *excuse* giving in to sin (Jude 1:4). He has promised you freedom and the power of His Spirit *to live righteously* in His Kingdom and *to deny* ungodliness and worldly desires (Titus 2:11,12). Follow Paul’s command and submit to God’s will and Lordship in your life. Then you’ll have His power to resist the devil, who, upon seeing Him at work in you, will back away (2 Timothy 4:7).

To remain safe and secure on the mountaintop of living for Lord Jesus, it’s essential that you use the freedom He has given you to fulfill His purposes in and through you as His work in progress (Titus 2:14). This is where many stray to the sides of the mountain, giving themselves over to the siren call of their sinful desires. Remember, if giving way to our sin nature were *not possible*, God’s spokesmen wouldn’t have to warn us against it!

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13; see also 1 Peter 2:16).

God didn’t give us His Word so that we could casually read it and then set it aside as you would a newspaper. Rather, He spoke through His servants so that we would *hear* with responsive hearts and *obey*. A life that pleases Him is determined to walk uprightly to *bring Him praise* among those who have yet to encounter Him. How do you know what pleases Him? You *hide His Word in your heart*, fully determined to follow it (Psalms 119:11). That way you’re aware of what brings Him joy as well as what violates and grieves Him.

We’ve written about the importance of *prayerfully applying* the Bible to your

life, particularly as you discuss with your family and extended spiritual family its application to your life situations. Page 14 of our book *Christian Halakhahs* presents helpful steps to guide you.

(4) Living a repentant life, free from unconfessed sin and demonic strongholds.

Because Jesus paid the penalty for you sins so that you can be reconciled with our Father and enjoy covenant union in His Spirit, you have a righteous responsibility in this relationship! Through His Word and the convicting work of the Spirit, you come to know what our Lord considers sin in your life. And through that same Spirit, you are equipped to *apply* God’s Word out of loving devotion to your Lord.

When you fail to keep His ways and teachings and commands, He has also provided you access to forgiveness and cleansing through this wonderful means: *repentance*. When you repent in the pattern established in the Hebrew Scriptures and taught by Lord Jesus, you’re *turning away from* your offenses, determining to forsake them. Then you *turn toward* your gracious Father through the sacrificial work of Jesus, so that you receive His forgiveness, experience His cleansing, and are restored in glorious fellowship (1 John 1:9).

Repentance begins with love-based sorrow that you have offended your Lord. You *turn from* your sinful action and return as a way of life to *applying His Word*.

The Bible interweaves repeatedly your *loving God* and *obeying His commands* (for example, John 14:15; 1 John 2:3,4). In fact, when you authentically repent, you turn to God and *do the right-*

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eous works that befit your repentance (Acts 26:20). That’s putting His Word into practice in your life.

The demonic strongholds you established for yourself through disobedience in some area of your life or were passed down to you from your parents allow the devil to influence or agitate parts of your soul (your mind, will and emotions). If you don’t demolish those strongholds through the authority of Jesus, you’re giving the enemy direct access to your motives, thoughts and resultant actions — and he’ll steer them directly contrary to the commands of our Lord.

We recommend our book **Demolishing Strongholds**, a free download on our website, to discern if demonic influence is at work in *your* soul.

Sides of the Mountain — The Battle for Your Soul

Our Lord Jesus is ever faithful to intercede on our behalf and to strengthen and encourage us to endure to the end of our earthly pilgrimage. *No power on earth* can rip us out of His hands as we choose to stay securely in His grip on the top of the mountain!

Yet what if *we* choose to forsake that glorious relationship? What if *we* allow worry or troubles or worldly riches and pleasures to choke out His word in us, turning our hearts away from devotion to God so that we can gratify our sinful desires? (See Luke 8:14.)

What if *we* decide that walking wholly in Jesus as Lord of our lives is just too hard, too unpleasant, too confining — and decide not to remain in union with Him? What does Lord Jesus say about that kind of person? *“If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers...picked up,*

thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:6).

Our Lord isn’t warning us to scare us away from Him! Rather, Jesus is emphasizing just how important it is for us to cling to Him in *rightful relationship*, relying on Him in obedient trust and not allowing ourselves to even get close to the edge of falling away.

*But Christ is faithful as a Son over God’s house. And we are His house, **if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.***

*See to it, brothers, that none of you has a **sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.***

*We have come to share in Christ **if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.***

*See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused Him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, **if we turn away from Him** who warns us from heaven? (Hebrews 3:6,12,14,25; see also Mark 13:13).*

That little word *“if”* is crucial to making it through the narrow gate. Our life journey to the Throne of our Lord calls us to *hold on with diligence*, cooperating with His Spirit in loving obedience. Knowing this parameter for our pilgrimage to salvation, Satan will try every tactic to fan our sin nature into flame so that we succumb to temporal, sinful pleasure and turn away from our covenant in Jesus. That’s why we’re warned in advance:

*Therefore we must give **much more careful heed** to the things we have heard, **lest we drift away** (Hebrews 2:1).*

We need *daily* exhortation and encouragement from one another if we’re to stay on top of the mountain —encourage-

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ment that we WILL be with the Lord forever *if* we endure to the end (1 Thessalonians 4:17), and admonition to make sure none in our faith family is giving way to sin and becoming hardened in it (Hebrews 3:13).

When we get near the edge of the mountain, giving way repeatedly to temptation that leads to ongoing sin and perhaps spiritual death, we NEED someone close to us who will warn us to turn away from our sin and repent, returning to our gracious and receiving Lord (Revelation 3:19). That’s the faithfulness of your spouse or fellowship family who offer a *life-giving rebuke* out of concern and love for you (Proverbs 15:31)!

Committing a sin doesn’t get you off the top of the mountain! Our Lord saw all your sins from the cross and paid the penalty for each of them. No, it’s when you refuse to repent and confess your sin that you start your descent over the side.

You’ve probably grieved as we have when you’ve tried to warn people you care about that they’re in danger of falling over the edge of the mountain through their ongoing, willful disobedience and disregard of God and His commands. Many “churched” folks have worn us out because they want to go on *enjoying their sin* regardless of who is being hurt by it.

Resisting temptation is an activity that’s foreign to many who say they’re “Christian” but are presuming upon a misinterpretation of grace. Yet we’re commanded to recognize the demonic presence behind those temptations and *resist!* (See James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:9.) Once you’ve looked over the edge too often, or chosen to live for your flesh in ongoing unrepentance, you find it all the easier to slide down the side of the mountain

and become a **reprobate**.

A reprobate is someone who so consistently gives way to gratifying his sin nature that he wants nothing to do with the righteousness of Christ. His sensual nature discounts the Bible as too rigid, God’s standards as too harsh. Reprobates don’t want the kind of relationship God calls for in His Word, so He gives them over to a depraved mind. That leads to participation in all kinds of sin and rupturing relationships with those who might turn them away from their destructive path (see Romans 1:28-32).

How can you get across to someone who is playing with sinful matches that their pathway may lead to eternal fire? Perhaps this story may help.

An older follower of Jesus was approached by a younger married man who bemoaned that he’d “suddenly fallen into sin” with a woman at work. When asked about how the relationship started, the young man admitted that he’d been attracted to her from the start. In fact, he orchestrated times when they could talk during breaks and have lunch together.

With each point the young man made, the older man nudged a book on his desk a little closer toward the edge. Confessing that he’d lied to his wife about having to work overtime when in fact he was meeting with the woman, the young man even *blamed God* for not stopping him from this illicit affair! (Another nudge of the book.) All of this eventually became known to his wife, and she was devastated. Their relationship was shattered, their children angry at their unfaithful father.

As the young man concluded, “I just don’t know how this so suddenly happened!”, the book crashed to the floor.

“Did you think you could avoid the consequences when you so willingly gave way to temptation *every step of the way*? Each

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decision to sin led you closer to the edge,” the older man responded. “You may have wanted God to suspend those consequences on your behalf, but they were as inevitable as gravity was on this book once it went over the edge!”

An essential element of body life in Christ is the love that’s *willing to confront*. If you decide to look the other way when someone is sinning, you might as well be sinning yourself. As God warned His people Israel, if you don’t speak up to rebuke a brother who is sinning, you’re in reality hating him in your heart! And, you’re sharing in his guilt by tolerating his sin (Leviticus 19:17).

We need *mutual encouragement* to stay on top of the mountain as we help each other through sharing our giftings and our testimony (Romans 1:11,12). We *collectively* need to keep holding fast to our hope in Jesus without wavering (Hebrews

10:23). That calls for *availability* and *loving honesty* in each other’s lives! And, we’re called to access each other regularly so we can stir each other to good works that emanate from our love (Hebrews 10:24,25).

Once someone has chosen to become “darkened in their understanding”, they’ll increasingly give way to their sin nature and refuse to listen. They’re falling backward into hell if they continue on this path of rebellion.

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they keep crucifying again for themselves the Son of God, and keep putting Him to an open shame (Hebrews 6:4-6).



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Help them early on, when they may be more willing to see their error and repent!

Bottom of the Mountain—Fires of Hell

Let’s look at that woeful reality, the *opposite* of joyful union in Christ: the bottom of the mountain with eternity in hell. Hell is the final destination for those who forsake the Covenant our Father offers through the shed blood of Jesus, or never found reconciliation with Him through Jesus in the first place.

God has revealed Himself since the creation of the world through general revelation of His eternal power and Being (Romans 1:18-21). Those who refuse to know Him or submit to Him are *without excuse* before His judgement seat. Tragically, they *stand condemned already* (John 3:18,19).

We who have known the Lord yet forsaken His way of righteousness have brought destruction upon ourselves if we pursue the path of rebellion against our Lord and His commands:

*If we **deliberately keep on sinning** after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there **no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**, but only a **certain fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God**” (Hebrews 10:26,27; see also 2 Peter 2:20-22).*

Before we ever reach eternity, those who are truly unrepentant, the “**reprobate**”, have already chosen their destiny. At the top of the mountain, our Lord abundantly shows us mercy as we live repentantly in loving, obedient trust. But at the bottom of the mountain, there is no covering for the guilt and sin of the reprobate (Romans 2:3-9). They have forfeited His grace and will receive

the promised vengeance and fearsome judgment of the living God (Hebrews 10:29-31; see also Luke 12:5).

God has given us the Hebrew Scriptures with their unfiltered testimony of His interaction with His people Israel as an *example and a warning* to us who trust in Jesus as Lord and Redeemer (1 Corinthians 10:6,11). Have we *learned anything* about the consequences of deliberate disobedience in the face of such magnificent love? When Israel’s wickedness became more than righteous God could bear, His long-suffering patience came to an end:

*The end is now upon you and I will **unleash My anger** against you. I will **judge you according to your conduct** and repay you for all your detestable practices ... I will not look on you with pity or spare you; I will repay you **in accordance with your conduct** and the detestable practices among you. Then you will know that it is **I the LORD who strikes the blow**” (Ezekiel 7:3,9; see also Leviticus 26:21; Jeremiah 4:18).*

Today, when an individual, a faith community, or a nation continues to live in unrepentance, feasting on evil as they gratify their sin nature, they are considered **reprobate**. Their degenerate pursuit has become so despicable in God’s sight that He cuts them off even while they live. For example, Paul could have been addressing the widespread sexual perversion of today as he recounted God’s unwavering judgment: “*Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts ... receiving in their own persons the penalty appropriate to their perversion*” (Romans 1:26,27).

We’re living in a time of ever-increasing turmoil marked not only by economic downturn and loss of homes and

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jobs, but also by resistant new diseases and violence of the most depraved kind. In Ezekiel, chapter 10, the prophet describes the exodus of the *shekinah* glory of God from the Temple. Our long-suffering and compassionate God had had enough of the sins of Israel. Destruction followed His departure.

Will the sin and abomination that’s so tolerated within western Christendom unleash the due consequences of His grief and anger against our society as a whole? As in so many of the “natural” disasters we’ve heard about, both the faithful followers of Jesus as well as the unrepentant have suffered loss, injury and even death. Do you think YOU and your family will be spared when the dark days of chastisement come to full fruition in this country (Ezekiel 21:4)?

How are you preparing yourself and your family and extended faith family to *cooperate together* so you’ll all stay “on the top of the mountain” secure in His sustaining presence?

The exiled apostle John was privileged to be given specific messages to relate to seven communities of called-out family in Jesus in Asia Minor. While some aspects of this Revelation may seem mysterious, others are clearly defined.

The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels [messengers] of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (Revelation 1:20).

God uses angels as messengers to serve His purposes and to minister to His called-out ones (Psalms 103:20; Hebrews 1:14). *How* angels specifically function among His people may not be clear in Scripture, but they do guard the ways of

His faithful (Psalms 91:11). However, those who are NOT among His own do not benefit from their ministrations. We learned this in an unusual way:

Very early one Sunday morning we had dropped off our son, Mike Jr., at the airport so he could fly to Teen Mission in Florida. On the way back we decided to worship with a certain congregation. As we walked into the building for the service, Mike heard the Holy Spirit whisper, “Because of the depth of their tolerated sin, the angel of the Lord has removed the lampstand from this congregation. But I have a reason for you being here.”

After the service a couple we’d known for quite a while walked up and asked if they could speak with us: “We’ve been members here for many years, but this morning during our prayer time we heard the Spirit tell us, ‘The angel of the Lord has removed the lampstand. You too must leave.’”

Since the Holy Spirit had given the same message to Mike, we were able to confirm that they should leave. (It wasn’t long before the despicable actions of the congregation which were promoted by their leadership were exposed to public knowledge.)

Grievously, many faith communities today have become reprobate in God’s sight. As a consequence, He has removed His divine messenger from them. The prophetic warning of Amos is relevant today as *lawlessness* has taken hold of so many congregations:

‘The days are coming,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘when I will send a famine through the land — not a famine of bread or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD’ (Amos 8:11; see also Ezekiel 8:18).

Rather than calling for their people to repent, the leaders of these communities go to conferences to learn tech-

**“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out,
that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19)**

niques that have brought success to other clergy. Because their hearts are focused on worldly goals and methods, our righteous Lord is fulfilling His word:

For this reason [because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved] God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness (2 Thessalonians 2:11,12).

In Matthew 18:15-17 our Lord Jesus prescribes the steps we need to take with an unrepentant brother (or sister). If the person refuses to listen to anyone, then we're told to treat him as unrepentant. You must remove the person from fellowship in order to maintain communal righteousness.

One who has chosen the path of deliberate sin is now beyond human intervention. He or she was confronted, yet refused to turn away from sin and receive the forgiveness and cleansing that humble repentance would have produced.

Paul understood that the unrepentant individual has chosen to serve their sin nature rather than walk in obedient trust within the faith family. So the apostle takes a step further and commands that the unrepentant be **“handed over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord”** (1 Corinthians 5:5; see also 1 Timothy 1:20). Even though no human intervention can help, God uses Satan to drive an unrepentant person back to Him.

The *collective life* we're called to in the body of Christ as brothers and sisters is driven by love to promote righteousness and confront unrighteousness in our midst. In that way, lives can be changed,

and the power and love of the Spirit of Jesus in us testify to the as-yet lost that He does indeed offer a whole new life to those who know Him as their Lord!

We have some questions for you to discuss with your spouse and faith family:

- **Using the diagram on page 4, where would you place yourself? Your spouse? Those with whom you fellowship?**
- **Are you and your spouse equally yoked in your commitment to follow Jesus and in your determination to apply His Word to your lives? Is your faith community equally yoked with you in commitment and determination?**
- **Examine the four criteria for biblical fellowship, below. To what extent are these embraced in your home? In your fellowship family?**
 1. Your fellowship with others must spur you on to glorify our Father and Jesus through praise, worship, and living testimony.
 2. Your fellowship with each other must support your growth in Christ-likeness through cooperating with His Spirit.
 3. Your shared fellowship must encourage you toward repentance and the narrow gate.
 4. Your fellowship as extended spiritual family must embolden you to reveal Jesus to the lost in your daily lives.
- **Do you daily encourage your spouse? Others in your faith community? In what ways are you being encouraged by others who are family to you in Jesus?**
- **How did your fellowship family adopt whatever faith practices you have? Did they come from a religious conference, or did you develop them prayerfully through God's Word as you were guided by His Spirit?**