

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.
For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*
(Matthew 18:19,20)



SECTION 1 - LESSON 7

THE OLDER TESTAMENT

Foundation For Understanding Love

Origin Of Nurturing Family

Source For Discerning God's Revelation

Inception Of Applying God's Word



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Section 1 Lesson 7

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The Older Testament: *Foundation For Understanding Love*

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God,
the Lord is one.*

*Love the Lord your God with all your
heart and with all your soul
and with all your strength*

(Deuteronomy 6:4,5).

*Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God
with all your heart and with all your
soul and with all your mind.' This is the
first and greatest commandment.*

*And the second is like it: 'Love your
neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and
the Prophets hang on these
two commandments (Matthew 22:37-40).*

If you were to try to summarize the Older Testament *as God intended for you to understand it*, it could be expressed in Deuteronomy 6:4,5, above. The heart-cry of God throughout the Hebrew Bible expresses a longing for a *relationship* with His people. The essence of the Newer Testament is that same yearning.

Quoting from Deuteronomy, Jesus reiterated the *greatest commandment* (see Matthew 22:37-40, above). The Hebrew word for "love" in the above passages, *ahav* (ah-HAHV), means that you're filled with desire and delight and passion for the one you love. You *long* to be with our Lord. The meaning

of the Hebrew letters of *ahav* is "*a window into the Father's heart.*" *This is what it's like for you to have a love relationship with our Lord. He reveals His heart to you.*

The second of the ten commandments in the Hebrew Scriptures offers an assurance that outlasts the ages. Our Father promises to show His love to a thousand generations of those who *love* Him and *keep* His commandments (see Exodus 20:6).

Describe the quality of your love relationship with our Father. What has He revealed of Himself to you?

The same depth and quality of a love relationship that Scripture describes is demanded of those who claim to be Christian. Paul reminds us of this non-optional requirement in 1 Corinthians 13 when he discloses, "*without love I am nothing... I gain nothing... the greatest of these is love.*"

Everything in your Christian life — everything about knowing God and experiencing Him, everything about knowing and doing His will — depends

on the quality of your love relationship with God.

If your relationship with our Father and Jesus is not right, nothing in your life will be right.

Describe your love for others, and how you enact that love.

Ask two people close to you in the faith to evaluate the depth of your love. Encourage them to be specific. Note their responses.

The Older Testament: Origin Of Nurturing Family

“The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’” (Genesis 2:18).

These commandments which I give to you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up”
(Deuteronomy 6:6,7).

The above verses were the key to Hebraic success in establishing the *home* as the primary site for instilling God’s truths in their children. Paul apperceived Deuteronomy 6, above, when he exhorted fathers, *“Do not exasperate [i.e., bring to a point of frustration] your children;*

*instead bring them up in the **training and instruction of the Lord”** (Ephesians 6:4).*

“Train a child in the way he should go [i.e., in the way his personality, talents and motivations are steering him], and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6). Many Christians believe that God promises a particular outcome if they keep a specific rule. This premise has caused heartbreak for so many parents. They’ve been taught that the above verse guaranteed that their children would grow up walking in Jesus if they as parents raised them with Christian values.

Hebraic parents did not view the Book of Proverbs as a compendium of “cause and effect” promises. The Proverbs contained the best wisdom the sages could offer but didn’t carry any guarantees from God.

Raising your children in *the way each should go* bids you to spend such significant, ongoing time with your children that you can appreciate their individual personalities and motivations. Then you can *impress* into your offspring as a signet ring into wax the character and behaviors that please God.

With the awareness that comes from your own abiding intimacy with Him, you’re better able to discern God’s plan for each child for the vocation and way of life most suitable for him or her. The Hebrew word “*avodah*” means both work and worship. A young person whose parents have guided him into the calling God has prepared for him will work with thankfulness. A person who is grateful in his workplace is better able to fulfill his Lord’s purpose in his being there, and to bring God glory as he works.

Spiritual life in western 21st century religious practice is often viewed in

terms of *church activity* rather than *daily intimate relationship with the Father*. A vast majority of the activity benefits the person taking part and requires little or no sacrifice or responsibility except to show up on time. The focus on the *congregational gathering* as the venue for spiritual activity has robbed believers of something our Hebraic ancestors in the faith understood all too clearly:

the home was the primary place for spiritual development.

Within the *home* parents role-modeled their relational intimacy and love-grounded obedience to their Lord. The home is also where their marriage shined as they reflected the love of God in their relationship with each other.

Few North American Christians view their home as the key place for spiritual development. Often the home takes second place to the church building activities or Christian school for the development of spiritual training and growth in their family.

Most fathers/husbands “outsource” their wives and families for religious indoctrination. They expect that the professionals — the pastoral staff — will feed their family all the spiritual nourishment they need in order to grow in Christ-likeness. They hope that their children will absorb what they hear in Sunday school and youth group and grow up to be “Christians”. Sadly, studies show that less than 23% of the children do so.

Many clergy with whom we’ve talked over the years admit that the programs and activities in their congregations compensated for the lack of spiritual emphasis in the home. In other words, religious programs are designed to *release*

husbands and fathers from their biblical responsibilities.

[See our Hebraic Article: [He Has Showed You.](#)]

We once surveyed a sizable group of clergy, asking if they took time for family prayer or worship or Bible study in their own homes. Although each of them admitted to having his own devotional/prayer time, not one of them included his family in any spiritual participation in the home other than grace before meals.

The spiritual life of our Hebraic ancestors was focused on the *home*. “Judaism survived persecution in every generation because the real structure and function of religious life was **home-centered**. The strength of the family exists in peace-filled religious **family** functions.”¹

Thoughts to consider:

The virtues of Christ-like character are learned in the crucible of the home. *How* parents live is as important as what they say; they are the first picture of God that a child has. That first impression will ultimately affect a child’s concept of God as Father, Shepherd and Lord.

This is truly an awesome responsibility for which no amount of outside teaching can compensate. A husband/father must use his family time wisely!

Detail how spiritual development takes place in your home.

Would Jesus feel welcomed in your home? Why or why not? Would you be embarrassed if He arrived unannounced?

The Older Testament: Source for Discerning God's Revelation

"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

In the Newer Testament two Greek terms, when translated into English, mean "word." These terms are *logos* (LAH-goss) and *rhema* (RAY-muh). *Logos* represents God's ways and thoughts, forever unchangeable. The Bible is God's *logos* written down for man. The apostle John also uses the word *logos* to refer to Jesus as the eternal Word made flesh (see John 1:1).

Rhema is that specific word spoken directly and individually from God to the believer. God's *rhema* today often comes through the indwelling Holy Spirit, through a specific inspiration as you read the Bible, or through a prophetic word. Through the different sources of *rhema*, the Holy Spirit provides God's particular insights and marching orders for the individual.

The Spirit's activation in us is vital, as our capacity to understand God is so minute and His wisdom so beyond our comprehension:

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than

the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts' (Isaiah 55:8,9).

"*Rhema*," writes Derek Prince, "is like each of the broken pieces of bread with which Jesus fed the multitudes; it is *suit-ed to each person's need and capacity*; often it comes to us through another's hands. Thus, we can see the need for *connectedness* in the body of Christ, our need for one another."² (emphasis added)

In Matthew 4:4, above, the word "comes" is in the continuous present tense; it's ongoing. Another way to say this is, "*We must live on every word as it comes out of the mouth of God.*" Waiting for guidance from the Holy Spirit by the *rhema* of God is humbling to our sinful, self-confident nature. The resistant sin nature of a person will war against the *rhema* of God. Paul clearly understood this tension:

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other (Galatians 5:17).

Seeking the *rhema* of God is to us what gathering manna was for the Israelites during the Exodus: "*He gave you manna to eat in the desert... to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you*" (Deuteronomy 8:16).

The Hebraic early Church understood from the Older Testament how important it was to seek God's specific guidance. With obedience came victory.

King David sought God's specific guidance for his battles. When the Philistines attacked Israel, "*David inquired of the Lord, 'Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?' The Lord answered him, 'Go, for I will surely hand the Philistines over to*

you” (2 Samuel 5:19).

On another occasion when the Philistines attacked, David again prayed. This time God gave him a different strategy:

So David inquired of the Lord, and he answered, ‘Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, move quickly, because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army’ (2 Samuel 5:23,24).

Note this important point:

Just because God has provided specific guidance for a particular circumstance in your life or in someone else’s doesn’t mean that that direction will apply for all situations you encounter. Joshua and his people were given the *rhema* to march around Jericho seven times to gain the victory (see Joshua 6), yet God revealed other strategies for subsequent battles that required His guidance.

Our Lord intends that we learn from the examples inscribed in His Word, even the mistakes (1 Corinthians 10:11)! As the Israelites neared the Promised Land (see Joshua 9) they failed to confirm God’s will. It cost them dearly. The Gibeonites resorted to a ruse and approached the Israelites pretending to be from far away. Rather than seeking God’s perspective on the matter, Joshua and the leaders believed their lie.

This scenario is often repeated even in the lives of Christians who want to serve God. The closer they get to their objective, the more susceptible they are to being tricked by Satan if they don’t seek God’s *rhema*.

Never lose sight of the fact that the

early Church relied solely on the Hebrew Scriptures and the Holy Spirit for direction. “They had to depend on the Holy Spirit and His teaching and guidance. They had no other option but to minister, to preach, and to write under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”³

As the various manmade forms of church governments developed over the centuries, an important element of guidance for the early Church was forsaken: seeking God’s specific *rhema* for faith communities. Today as well, man has insisted on trusting corporate methodology rather than humbly seeking God’s *rhema* until it is revealed as did the faith communities in the earliest Church.

So many religious leaders pay to attend conferences in which other “successful” religious leaders expound on how they increased “nickels and noses” in their congregations. To our detriment, the worldly measures of man’s success have replaced reliance on the *rhema* of God.

Believers in the early Church recognized the futility of “*leaning on their own understanding.*” They wanted Spirit-inspired revelation, not analytical reasoning, to guide their way.

Take a close look at an example of how one of the faith communities of the earliest Church sought God’s guidance:

In the Antioch congregation were prophets and teachers... One time when they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, “Set aside for me Barnabba and Sha’ul for the work to which I have called them.” After fasting and praying, they placed their hands on them and sent them off (Acts 13:1-3,CJB).

The *rhema* from the Holy Spirit, God's specific revealed will, set apart Saul and Barnabas for their particular ministry. Their fellow family in Jesus confirmed that will by commissioning them to go forth to carry it out. This is the way of God. His way is never found in conferences that promote the methods of man in place of God.

Another important point should encourage your heart: When God reveals a *rhema* for a specific purpose, He also empowers the individual involved to fulfill it. In the Older Testament He empowered Joseph to interpret dreams. *Then* He gave the young ruler wisdom to guide the Egyptians through the famine (see Genesis 41). To Moses God gave the admonition to warn of miraculous signs (see Exodus 8) that would ultimately free the enslaved Israelites.

In the Newer Testament the angel Gabriel told Mary, *"You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High"* (Luke 1:31). When Mary asked how a virgin could conceive, the angel replied, *"Nothing is impossible with God"* (v. 37).

In other words, every word (*rhema*) that comes from God will bring with it the power to fulfill His purpose. Mary's humble acceptance to willingly obey what had been told her was faith enough for God to act. *"May it be to me as you have said"* (v. 38).

[See the poem **Step By Step** in the back of our book, *Demolishing Strongholds*].

The Bible commands a married man to seek *rhema* from God for his family: *"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" (Ephesians 5:25,26).

The term used for "word" here, *rhema*, means more than quoting Bible verses to your spouse. It implies seeking and applying *God's revelations* to her life. A wife who sees her husband humbly seeking God's will on behalf of her and their children finds it that much easier to respect him (see Ephesians 5:33). His humility also helps cleanse her from the curse of women wanting to rule their husbands (see Genesis 3:16).

A man's *sacrificial attitude* of seeking God's will (see Deuteronomy 8:16) displays a depth of humility, love and dependence that reveals the character of Jesus in him. And, the *"sword of the Spirit, which is the rhema of God"* (see Ephesians 6:17) finds power to combat the hosts of darkness arrayed against his home. He must wield it with that same sacrificial heart by applying in faithful obedience that which Scripture tells him.

Is seeking God's *rhema* a new consideration for you? (Yes) or (No). If yes, how have you been determining God's will for yourself and your family?

If seeking God's *rhema* has been the pattern of your faith walk, describe the various ways He has revealed His *rhema* to you. Has your family been responsive to the insights God has shown you?

The Older Testament: *Inception Of Applying God's Word*

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:6).

Jesus called Himself “the Way”. In the Book of Acts the early Christians were known as “the Way”: **“But this I do admit to you: I worship the God of our fathers in accordance with the Way (which they call a sect). I continue to believe everything that accords with the Torah and everything written in the Prophets”** (Acts 24:14,CJB).

Note that Paul made no distinction between his adherence to “the Way” in Jesus and his obedience to the Law and the prophetic writings of the Hebrew Bible. This use of the term “the way” has a very distinct Hebraic importance known as *halakhah* (HAH-luh-kuh). *Halakhah* comes from the root word “*halak*”, which means “to walk”.

Halakhah in the Older Testament is the way God's Law was interpreted and applied to a particular situation. One of several true options provided in the Bible was determined and applied to a given actual situation.

Enacting a *halakhah* meant assuming personal responsibility before God for living in accordance with His commands. The emphasis was on seeking the *best application* of His commands.

There's a scriptural pattern here:

- The Hebrew Bible, God's *logos* for the Israelites, revealed God's *broad commands* for His people.
- A *halakhah* was God's *specific application* of His commands, a “Thus saith the Lord” on the matter.

For example, in the Book of Ruth, Boaz approached the elders of the city concerning the property of Naomi and Ruth. God's law stipulated,

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her (Deuteronomy 25:5).

Boaz had been approached by Ruth to exercise this privilege, called “the right of the kinsman-redeemer”. But, he knew that there was a relative closer than himself who had the right of first refusal to fulfill the responsibility.

Despite his desire to marry Ruth, Boaz approached that relative and brought him to the elders. When the kinsman refused his responsibility, the elders applied the law to Boaz and he married Ruth.

This action on the part of the elders would have been recorded as a *halakhah*, a precedent in applying the law that had been established in Deuteronomy. Although Boaz wasn't Ruth's dead husband's brother, the principle behind the law was fulfilled, and Boaz became the legal owner of Ruth's property through marriage.

As we mentioned, a biblical application, that is, a *halakhah*, is God's perspective *for you* on the issue in question. *Halakhahs* were revered alongside the *logos* as God's decision for application of His Word. This process is similar to the laws our legislatures enact. Over time, as laws are applied in the courts, *legal precedents* become established. The law and the precedents carry equal merit for determination of guilt or innocence.

The Older Testament prophets often spoke in broad terms rather than specific details. Amos intoned, “*Let justice roll like a river*” (5:24). *Halakhah* translated the generality into something do-able: setting up a food pantry for the poor, providing suitable housing for widows and orphans as an expression of one’s faith in God (see James 1:27; 2:14-17).

Some practical considerations:

In the halakhic process, when you’re weighing a passage or verse, consider the *plain sense* of scriptural meaning first. Metaphorical spiritualization or allegorization should never replace what would have been *clearly understood* by the writer or by his audience.

Hellenism’s intrusion into Christianity altered large parts of the Hebrew Scripture into allegories. (We’ll discuss this more in a later lesson.) For example, the account of a man’s love relationship with a woman in the Song of Songs became a spiritualized story of Jesus and His relationship with the Church.

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- If the Greek ideals of rhetoric and a “higher plane of thought” could be considered as poetry,
- then *halakhah* could definitely be pictured as prose, as *practical application* of God’s will for you.

Halakhah deals with your tasks and responsibilities in your everyday existence, not with some visionary escape to a perfect world that you’ll never find here on earth!

Halakhah was not intended to be a mere code of rules to delineate your behavior in each life situation. It was also an expression of a yearning for a *dynamic love relationship* with God. The Hebraic stream recognized that this rela-

tional aspect was necessary if God were to be more than just an abstract religious concept: “The need for order must not be at the expense of *spontaneity, personal passion, novelty and surprise.*”⁴

To our Hebraic counterparts, God was far from being a distant, unapproachable deity. A major purpose of *halakhah* was to bind an individual to God through love that was evidenced in his or her obedience. The Apostle John captures this essence when he writes, “***This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome***” (1 John 5:3).

Because living by a biblical framework that pleased God was nothing new, Jesus bestowed on His followers the authority to establish their own *halakhahs*:

I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them (Matthew 18:18-20; see also Matthew 16:19).

Most Christians today have *halakhahs* without being conscious of it. If you’re married you may have prayerfully established with your spouse a biblical understanding of matters that impact your family. Some of these may involve birth control, or your decision before God to educate your children in a public school, Christian school, or home school. Your biblically-based decisions are your *halakhahs* for your family.

You explore the Word of God and seek the understanding of the Holy Spirit, the *rhema*, so that you can apply

God's will to your life. The reason you should discover and keep track of *halakhahs* for yourself and your family is so that you'll apply biblical truths to *all realms of your life*, whether to education, finances, ethical decisions, or religious practices.

Steps in Establishing *Halakhahs*

[Excerpt from our book: [Christian Halakhahs](#).]

When you are prompted by a need or concern to apply God's Word, let the following four steps guide you.

1 Prayer. To establish a *halakhah* for your particular issue, pray. Ask for a spirit of wisdom and revelation (see Ephesians 1:17), entreating our Father to convey His will regarding your issue or concern.

2 Bible passages. Next, ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind any verses or passages from the Bible that would apply to your situation. Don't try to apply anything to your situation *until* you're sure that you've compiled all possible biblical references.

Some verses will be more pertinent than others. That is, you'll recognize one or more of the verses as more foundational to the issue. Other verses will add understanding to the foundation.

When you've taken the extra effort to pursue all the biblical leads prompted by the Holy Spirit, a sense of peace will probably rest on you and anyone who may be sharing this investigation with you.

3 Biblical application. Armed with the appropriate verses and passages, you can address your problem and con-

cern. Be careful to not get into "if—then" reasoning as you try to apply the Word to the situation. ("But if I do such-and-such, _____ might happen!")

The normal tendency after pondering the Bible application to the situation is to immediately draw conclusions and ask questions. What will this decision cost you? How will this affect others? What changes will you need to go through if you decide to live by this new conviction?

No matter how strong the urge is to weigh the personal cost of your decision — don't! You must first determine in your heart that you *do* have the correct biblical application for your situation. The Holy Spirit will again give you peace if this is what God wants for you.

4 Action to take. Only after you're convinced in your heart that you have correctly applied God's Word to your situation is it time to take the next step, *application of grace*. Grace is the power and desire to uphold God's truth in your life no matter what it costs you.

Remember, you're applying *halakhahs* to your life because of your *love for Jesus*. The goal is *not* right behavior for its own sake. If correct behavior in the hopes of gaining God's favor is your motivation, you'll become prideful. You may even develop a disdain for others who don't live or think the way you do.

God's grace will enable you to keep your new conviction because of your desire to lovingly obey Him. Continue to pray for grace. And repent of your failure for not having known these new truths or lived by them before this time.

If this method hasn't been part of your faith enactment before, it may take a little time to follow the halakhic process yourself and with those close to you. Be patient with each other! Each of the four steps is important. Go over them again to be sure you understand the importance of each one.

Can you understand the difference between *creeds* that others have established for the multitudes by Church Councils, and *halakhahs* that you develop for your own life? Articulate the difference.

To help you make this important responsibility part of your way of life, write out *halakhahs* for two areas or concerns in which you haven't applied the Bible before.

Bibliography

1. See Ron Cantrell and Olivia Wheatly Stachorek, "Back to Our Roots: Little Sanctuaries", *Dispatch from Jerusalem*, May/June 1994, p. 8.
2. Derek Prince, *Faith to Live By* (Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Derek Prince Publications, 1977) p. 79,80. Prince further explains that *logos* is revealed in Psalm 119:89: "*Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven.*" He adds that *rhema* is a "living voice" to us — the very words have life imparted to them, and our response to them is "hearing by faith." (p. 80).
3. David DuPlessis, *The Spirit Bade Me Go* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1970) p. 84.
4. David B. Hartman, "Halakhah", *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr, Editors. ©1987. p. 310.