

Yeshua MISHPACHAH

A NEWSLETTER TO THE FAMILY OF JESUS FROM RESTORATION MINISTRIES

The Hebraic family is not simply an individual or private matter. Rather, it is an institution in which the whole community has a stake. Thus, the Hebrew word "mishpachah," meaning family, not only refers to parents and children, but to the whole extended family worldwide in the body of "Yeshua"— our Jesus.

Dear Friends,

This is delightful time for us as we watch our Lord open the eyes of His people to the restoration of the Church now underway around the world. In our last letter we quoted James Dobson; here is Rick Joyner, who has a wide audience in the Christian community: "It is time for the sons of Zion to rise up against the sons of Greece as prophesied in Zechariah 9:13. The religion of secular humanism was born out of the ancient philosophies of Greece. It is time for those who are born of God to understand that these philosophies are enemies of the cross and have no place in the church...One area of great concern is the 'psychologizing of the gospel,' which has resulted in perpetual obsession with our wounds."

A wonderful event in the history of Christianity is occurring. We trust that those who read this letter will open their eyes and ears to what the Spirit of God is doing.

In this letter we want to cover a few more key features of the early Church that made it a powerful force able to overcome an empire that had enslaved its subjects through subjugation and oppression.

Righteousness, Prayer, & Relationships

1. Righteousness & Prayer

One of the important goals of early Church believers was to have their prayers answered. Think about this for a moment. The Book of Acts begins with a small band of disciples: *"They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers"* (Acts 1:14). When they prayed, something happened. Following the release of Peter and John in Acts 4, the people

prayed: *"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly"* (Acts 4:31). Miraculous answers to prayer continued to abound. How about Peter's release from prison in Acts 12? *"So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him."* Despite his chains and guards, he was delivered by an angel. *"Then Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.' When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying"* (Acts 12:5-12).

Consider Paul and his numerous requests for prayer: "Pray continually"; "Brothers, pray for us."; "With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith." He wasn't asking for words to be spoken to God. Paul was looking for the reply God would give in answer to prayer.

The Book of James contains many Hebraic themes of the early Church: Trusting faith that results in action; concern for the poor and underprivileged; humility that displaces pride; warnings against greed. It also contains the key prerequisite for God answering prayer. That prerequisite is righteousness. "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth

produced its crops" (James 5:16-18).

In Hebrews 5:8 we are told regarding Jesus' prayers that *"he was heard because of his godliness [righteousness]."*

Because of the collective awareness of the early Church, the followers of Jesus were deeply concerned with communal as well as personal righteousness. Their history showed that God had hindered the conquering of the city of Ai by the whole nation of Israel because of the sin of one man, Achan (see Joshua 7). God demonstrated this same standard of righteousness for the fledgling Church by taking the lives of Ananias and Sapphira because they *"lied to the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 5:1-11). The Lord's Supper was based on the Jewish Passover observance that took place after all leaven had been removed from the land, signifying a state of holiness (righteousness) in order for them to keep the Passover. Paul understood the priority of righteousness, that is, the confession of sin, required before sharing communion. *"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment"* (1 Cor. 11:26-31).

At times while we served at the retreat center, church leaders would

bemoan the large incidence of illness² in their churches. We responded, "Most likely your communion is being defiled by sin" and pointed them to the above passage of scripture. Partaking of communion in the early Church was a serious communal activity. These believers had not been confronted with the Greek philosophical argument over the elements of communion that divide Protestants and Catholics today. The early Hebraic Church understood the Passover and believed what Jesus said, *"This is my body..." "This is my blood..."* (Some research of the early Church supports that the followers of Jesus got together in homes for the specific purpose of receiving communion.)

The critical factor in any of the early Church practices was fellowship with the Father and His Son, Jesus: *"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ"* (1 John 1:3). Without a right relationship with Him there is no fellowship. God provided a simple means to restore fellowship and righteousness broken by sin: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).

The breaking of bread in the home was not only critical in maintaining strong relationships but in upholding righteousness. Home gatherings provided accountability by which the Lord's teaching on dealing with a person who sins could be carried out: *"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. 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" (Matt. 18:15-20). The effect of the above passage was individual and communal righteousness. God knew the weakness of man and his inability to always maintain His standard of righteousness. Adam and Eve had been in God's presence and were still able to sin. Even King David, a man after God's own heart, was an adulterer and murderer. The key factor for David was his repentance and confession when rebuked of his sin. He wanted to be restored to righteousness so that his relationship with God could be restored.

Confession and repentance were (and are) key to maintaining an ongoing prayer life that results in answered prayer. Remember that in the early Church to be "born again" meant coming to a point of putting full trust and reliance in Jesus Christ. Believers covenanted to enter into a Lord-slave servant relationship. The foundation of the relationship was based upon mutual love that carried with it responsibility. The Lordship of Jesus necessitated an obedient servant. Lack of trust, unlovingness, or disobedience by the servant was sin that ruptured the relationship. The Lord was seeking a repentance that sorrowed over breaching the relationship. This sorrow produced repentance: *"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death"* (2 Cor. 7:9-10).

Over the centuries the Church has acquiesced to the Greek philosophical approach of repentance and confession of the offensive act that was committed. This is acceptable but incomplete. The Hebraic early Church was relational, not cognitive. Repentance required taking responsibility for the damage and hurt done in the relationship. This is a dramatic focal change from "what the hurtful action was" to "who was by hurt the action." Because the standard of being born again was loving trust in God, the severity of sin could be felt in the violation of Someone with Whom they had a loving and trusting relationship. Consider how our marriages and families could be blessed if we restore this truth and through repentance are affected by the

hurt we have done.

The early Church was almost entirely Jewish. They knew that atonement for sin must be made through the shedding of blood. Through the Hebrew Bible, they knew that atonement could never be made by human effort; it required the grace of God. God had commanded a substitutionary atonement that required the yearly sacrifice of an unblemished lamb. Early believers understood the importance of the shed blood of Jesus fulfilling the just requirements of their holy God.

The early Church clearly understood that God cannot be approached in just any manner. Even the high priest could enter the holy of holies only after the sprinkling of blood. Using the parable of the wedding banquet to describe the kingdom of God (see Matt. 22:1-14), Jesus tells His listeners that some outrightly resist the King's offer; some even kill His messengers. Some accept His invitation but fail to prepare themselves to enter His presence: "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'" (Matt. 22:11-13).

The Hebrew Bible told them that even earthly kings had requirements for entering their presence. Esther understood this when Mordecai implored her to approach her husband, King Xerxes, on behalf of the Jews who were about to be annihilated: *"Any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king"* (Esther 4:11).

Consider the above condition of approaching the king when you read Heb. 4:16: *"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*

This verse standing alone could seem³ to indicate that we may approach the throne with confidence in any manner. The early Church understood this to be false. The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes the necessary prerequisite of the shed blood of Jesus: *"He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption....How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"* (Heb. 9:12,14).

Conclusion: It is not because of our righteousness that our prayers are heard by God. It is because we put trusting faith in the shed blood of Jesus that our sins are forgiven. The Gentile Church often sees Adam and Eve's sin as an act of disobedience. From the Hebraic view, they failed to maintain loving trust in the Father and so disobeyed.

Prayer in the early Church was warfare. The Hebrew Bible reiterated that prayerful trust in the loving Father was key to God's answer for them. They knew from Daniel 10 that demonic forces oppose the ministering angels bringing God's answer. Their righteous forefather prayed for 21 days before the heavenly messenger with the help of the angel Michael broke through. Jesus used the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8 to encourage His followers: *"And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?"* (Luke 18:7).

2. Relationships

The Bible shows that Satan's goal through unconfessed sin and spiritual strongholds is to:

1. Hinder our ability to lovingly relate to God our Father as He desires. This results in our inability to trust Him. The most noticeable effects in our lives are fear, doubt, and unbelief.

2. Keep us from establishing relationships in small spiritual communities as epitomized in the early Church. [Hebrew: Mishpachah; Greek: Oikos]

These small groups were designed for support and encouragement to enable us to grow in loving trust in our heavenly Father. The early Church met both in the homes and in the temple courts. We believe the temple courts are the equivalent of congregational gatherings on Sunday.

The early Church was born into a community of Jewish self-awareness. In its infancy the Church for some time remained a sect within Judaism. The Church in the New Testament can only be understood in light of the Jewish relational practices of the home and synagogue that became the pattern for the Church. With the incursion of Greek philosophy into the Christian community after the 2nd century, much of this relational quality has been lost. Many of the "body life" verses of the New Testament are difficult to carry out in the current individualistic religious culture of the US today.

The loss of the biblical importance of righteousness has made the church a repository for anyone who acknowledges the "gospel." Standards of righteousness and accompanying repentance are minimally kept at best. It is rare to find the free flowing miraculous of the Book of Acts. As mentioned previously, the Bible presents criteria for fellowship among God's people. People are influenced by the relationships they keep. Although not in the Bible, the phrase "guilt by association" has biblical origin. Bill Gothard, in his Life Principles Seminar, has observed that when teens get together, "how quickly the rebels find each other."

The Bible affirms certain relationships and warns against others:

"He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm" (Prov. 13:20).

"If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard.' Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid" (Deut. 21:18-21).

"When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army...."Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be faint-hearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. Then the officers shall add, "Is any man afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too" (Deut. 20:2,3,8).

"Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared" (Prov. 22:24,25).

Each of us should take the time to judge the close relationships we keep. Do they strengthen us in our trust in Our Lord? Do they enable us to grow in an ever-increasing Christlikeness? Has our courage to follow Jesus grown, remained the same, or even decreased through these relationships?

Prov. 27:17 tells us, *"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."* We believe that the Bible is talking about men of courage and valor. Two marshmallows cannot sharpen each other. Courageous people attract other courageous people. "Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, 'Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.'" (1 Sam. 14:6).

"David said to the Philistine, 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied'" (1 Sam. 17:45).

David and Jonathan recognized the courage in each other and experienced tremendous devotion: *"And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself"* (1 Sam. 20:17)

"[David speaking] I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women" (2 Sam. 1:26).

David's courage attracted other men of valor to his side: *"These are the*

names of David's mighty men: Josheb-⁴ God's house. And we are his house, if Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter. Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite [who] stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them" (2 Sam. 23:8-11)

These three men were supported by thirty other mighty men. Think of the importance of courage, and that valiant people attract other people of courage. The scriptures connect courage and righteousness. In essence, righteousness produces courage:

"The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion" (Prov. 28:1).

"Then you will have success if you are careful to observe the decrees and laws that the Lord gave Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged" (1 Chron. 22:13).

The New Testament writers understood the importance of courage: "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13).

"But Christ is faithful as a son over

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. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first" (Heb. 3:6, 12-14).

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