

Prophetic Insights
June 24, 2013
The Bible Cannot Be Just Informational Insight

Dear Friends,

In May, 1969 I began Navy flight training. My first roommate, George, had been a radar intercept officer in the back seat of F-4 Phantom jets in Vietnam. Now the Navy had allowed him to reenter flight training to be a pilot. After our initial introduction George added knowingly, "Mike, the essence of flying is flying. Ground school helps, but it's what you do in the cockpit that makes you a great pilot." And for us who love and serve Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the principle is the same: "The essence of following Jesus is GROWING INCREASINGLY MORE LIKE HIM."

Fitted with combat experience, George became my mentor. Every night after supper we'd spend time in the trainers until we each had the procedures for the next flight perfect. George was right. Even though we went through daily ground school classes, it was what you did in the cockpit that reflected your ability as a pilot. Let me add this. To be an excellent pilot requires far more than just acquiring the skill to fly the aircraft. Your character changes too as you have to humble yourself to receive necessary correction. Not only did George **rebuke** me when I made serious mistakes, so did my flight instructors. They had been to war themselves and understood the severity of the situations I would encounter when I entered the battle arena.

Their **rebuke** was a blessing to me because I could feel that it truly mattered to them that I live to return home. A rebuke serves a purpose along the lines of the Word of God as it pierces any facades thrown up to ward it off: *"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart"* (Hebrews 4:12). A **rebuke** either creates resentment in your heart toward the rebuker, revealing rebellion and pride. Or, it produces feelings of deep appreciation because someone cared enough about you to point out your error and help you change.

- How are you in accepting rebukes?
- Does a rebuke arouse resentment in you?
- Do you do what so many Christians do to forestall a rebuke: hide behind a veneer of overt friendliness?
- Do you do acts of kindness and generosity so that others feel indebted to you, especially those who can't reciprocate?
- Do you 'motor-mouth,' controlling others so they won't point out any faults or shortcomings in you?

***"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.
So be earnest, and repent"***

(Revelation 3:19; see also Deuteronomy 8:5; Proverbs 3:12; Hebrews 12:10).

A foundation of authentic biblical friendship among those who follow Jesus is the willingness to give and receive rebukes from each other. Think about it. The Bible tells us that a key sign of God's love for His own is that He rebukes us. Many in Christendom prefer to perceive His love as a congenial and permissive acceptance of anything they do no matter who else may be hurt. But that's not how His Word reveals the nature of His love! As family members together in Christ, giving and receiving appropriate rebukes should be part of our relationship with each other so that any area of our lives that's unChristlike may be addressed and corrected. After all, those who call themselves Christian are representing Christ to others, even as clay pots in the Spirit's hands (see Isaiah 64:8; 2 Corinthians 4:7). What others see in us and hear from us bear witness to the nature and reputation of Jesus. We for sure want to be representing Him in a way that pleases our Father, even if that means a brotherly rebuke is needed!



Use your concordance to study the word "rebuke" in the Bible. Here are a few references to get you started. What is the benefit of a rebuke in each of these verses? *"He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise"* (Proverbs 15:31);

"Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear" (Proverbs 25:12);

"Better is open rebuke than hidden love" (Proverbs 27:5);

"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him" (Luke 17:3).

The widespread absence of rebukes in contemporary Christendom is the missing building block in relationships among men and among women. The lack of interpersonal correction for the sake of growing in Christ's likeness can be traced back to seminaries and the influence of Hellenism on the teaching methods used in those institutions. Through long-standing Hellenist influence on seminaries, the Bible is presented as academic content taught behind a podium or in a classroom. Students therefore are trained to lecture Bible content themselves in similar venues, further confining God's Word to a monologue in a formal setting of fact acquisition.

The Hebraic method which permeates the biblical text, however, requires a teacher to instruct, demonstrate, and correct through *ongoing personal contact* those he or she is discipling. As with the discipleship methods Jesus used with His own followers, making use by faith of the power the Spirit brings forth and developing the character qualities which set His people apart from the world are core values that need to be imparted through putting them into practice. It's like learning how to fly, or serving an apprenticeship in which you're prepared to disciple others.

In 1974 I was sent by the Navy to get a Master's degree in Business Administration in

order to more adequately fulfill my collateral duties. I majored in organizational psychology and interpersonal relationships. Most of the professors used class discussion as a means to help us both learn and apply the material presented. But one particular professor with whom I had several classes asked us to write "application papers" each week showing how we had *put into practice* what we were taught during each class session. I was amazed how there seemed to be such Divine orchestration. Whatever topic was discussed in each class, an event would occur before the next class in which I had a chance to apply what I'd learned. Becoming aware that God was indeed behind the connectedness of each week's teaching and the opportunities to apply it was to have great impact on a paper I would write several years later at seminary.

In 1976 I began to read the Bible for the first time. I realized right away that God didn't intend that I perceive His Word as some form of **informational insight** through which I just added knowledge to my brain. His Word contained the nature of His loving plan of grace for my life in Christ, and His commands revealed how I was to live in obedient trust by applying them to my life. There was such an indissoluble link between loving Jesus and obeying what He said! My love for my Lord Jesus needed to be demonstrated through keeping His commands (John 14:21,15:10; 1John 5:3; 2John 1:6).

Even as a spiritual infant I realized that following Jesus as *Lord* means *following Him* as my Master and Shepherd. It's the essence of flying all over again! This relationship of love-grounded obedient trust in Jesus as our Lord met Sue's heart also, and this has been the foundation to our faith walk. It's amazing that when your hearts are burdened to love Jesus and serve Him and become like Him through His Spirit, rebukes are received as a blessing. You cherish people who love you enough to show you where you're falling short of being transformed into His likeness.

In 1978 I resigned my Navy commission and began to attend an interdenominational seminary. I was interested in why Christendom was full of so many competing denominations and sects. In light of the unity Jesus calls for among His own (see John 17:20-23), these broadly accepted divisions seemed to violate God's Word. The vast majority of courses that I took at seminary were taught by men who had strong academic credentials but for the most part little experience in the trenches of living as an example of Jesus among worldly, biblically resistant people. As a result, most of the courses were *informationally insightful* rather than developmental in both Christ-like character qualities and obedient responsiveness.

Many of the professors had themselves learned the Bible and related subjects as academic information that added to their mental stores of knowledge. And that's how they taught their students who went out and did likewise. But when the Bible is presented as mere **informational insight**, the learner has no sense of personal responsibility for following through in what it commands as a way of life. Again, this is the insidious influence of Hellenism which is perpetuated via seminaries into pulpits and even Christian TV! Now consider this regarding your own life. If you've been taught God's Word without your teacher being able to rebuke you when necessary, you are only gaining **infor-**

mational insight. And as with all information, you can conveniently file it away in your mind as optional to your life.

We've previously recounted elsewhere how one professor at the seminary asked me to survey graduates in the area to determine the fruitfulness of his years of teaching there. When I gave him the results of my survey he was dismayed. He recognized that I hadn't been in the religious system long enough to be tainted by its goals and ways, so he asked me to do a paper on what I thought churches that functioned in a biblical pattern should be doing. I'd like to recount for you some aspects of that paper.

Because the Spirit had given me a gift of prophecy (see 1Corinthians 12:7, 14:1) when I became a follower of Jesus in 1977, I was keenly aware of spiritual giftings. I understood that the gifts the Spirit apportions to each follower of Jesus are at the core of our mutual cooperation in extending the Kingdom. In this light I believed it was supernatural that one person on a Sunday morning could be given a message to preach by the Holy Spirit that was suited for an entire congregation. Yet having learned that people retain only 20% of what they hear, 70% of what they discuss, and 90% of what they demonstrate, I knew that if the sermon was going to help people actively follow Jesus and serve His Kingdom purposes, then **discussion, application, and appropriate correction** were needed for this to take place. And in the pattern of Jesus with His disciples, Paul and Silas with newly formed faith communities, and flight instructors with their students, following up on progress was going to be needed. Yet neither discussion, application, appropriate correction or follow up are a part of today's informational insight method of teaching the Bible.

Most of the professors at the seminary saw the essence of teaching as the material they taught.

The Bible reveals that Jesus understood teaching as what the disciples learned and practiced. What they learned was demonstrated in their way of life.

After my professor read the survey paper he'd assigned me, he shared it with some faculty members. To my surprise many were deeply offended by both the results and my recommendations! I realized from my previous training in organizational psychology that many of them were taking a defensive posture, "circling their wagons" around their idol of informational insight about the Bible and related subject matter. Yes, there were some few exceptions who asked me to help change their method of teaching Scripture as just factual information. I soon realized that the few men who were open to change had also experienced years of hands-on service to our Lord among other cultures. The seminary had trapped them into teaching informational insight, but in their hearts they knew that that method was not of God.

A pastor in the local area read my paper and asked to meet with me. In his congregation of about 50 adults, their Sunday school was followed by a worship service. Fewer than a dozen adults attended Sunday school class. The pastor agreed that change was needed in order to rouse the adults into participation and action! After discussion and

the consensus of the congregation, the Sunday morning format was altered. The worship service came first, followed by the Sunday school. With this new approach, the pastor would go over the contents of his sermon the day before with me and another man. The two of us would develop questions which would facilitate discussion and application in the adult Sunday school. Using the first five minutes of the Sunday school class the pastor answered any questions to clarify his message. But he couldn't preach further. After a few weeks he realized no one could pay attention to his 3-point sermon messages that took 40 minutes, so he reduced his sermon to 1 point which lasted about 15 minutes.

The adult Sunday school class sat at circular tables in groups of 8 to 10 people. (With this decidedly new strategy, attendance skyrocketed!) The questions the other guy and I developed from the sermon guided the discussion so that people could apply the message to their lives. (If you've gone through our online *Jesus in Your Home* video series, or *Discussing How to Restore the Early Church*, you're aware that we developed similar questions for your family and/or faith community discussion and application.)

Not only was discussion used in the Sunday school class, but role modeling as well. For example, a sermon might have addressed bitterness, and an individual recognized that he or she had unresolved bitterness toward a parent. Another person at the table would simulate being the parent while the bitter person would practice how to approach the parent in humility. In each Sunday school class, after the pastor answered questions time was allowed so the people at each table could follow up with one another in how they applied the previous Sunday's message to some situation in their life. They experienced what I had encountered in my MBA program: There is a Divine orchestration that gives you an opportunity to apply what you learned before the next Sunday school class. We also allowed time for people to share testimonies with the entire class so that all could be encouraged and strengthened in their faith walk. We noticed a sort of "**spiritual leapfrogging**" occurring: one person's testimony would spur someone else to take an action that they'd been reluctant to do.

Within a few weeks the people at each table were contacting each other outside of Sunday school, offering support, prayer and wisdom. A good number even got together during the week and became really close friends in the faith. Looking back now, we can see how each table became a sort of mini-home fellowship. In a little over a year the congregation tripled in size. There was a deep sense of caring for each other, and a willingness to live a way of life that represented their relationship with our Lord Jesus. After two years Sue and I moved on to another congregation to pursue a different avenue of service. We saw the same results when people are given the opportunity to discuss and apply God's Word together, accompanied by appropriate rebukes when necessary so that each may set aside whatever is hindering them from growing in Christ's likeness.

"People will be lovers of themselves ... having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them"

(2Timothy 3:2,5).

In James 2 we're told, even warned, that faith is evidenced in the actions it produces: *"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. As the body without the spirit is dead, so **faith without deeds is dead**"* (James 2:17,26). For many people, especially men whose Bible instruction has been through **informational insight**, "faith" is deciphered as something they know about and have given intellectual assent to. We've grieved over the years that these men have been blindly resistant to transformation into Christ-like character qualities. The very "faith" they cherish has become an idol of what they know but don't practice. Their "form of godliness" is what they can speak about God but don't see any need to enact through love.

The seductive power of knowing without doing has kept many Christian men from the humble path of developing the love of Jesus. When men learn the Bible in the guise of **informational insight**, they tend to view God's Word as material to be stored passively in their brain. They feel no compelling need for developing and manifesting the love, compassion, and mercy of Jesus. As with many of the professors I encountered at seminary, Bible knowledge is an amazing ego booster for men. Yet humility, in which a man sees all others as more important than himself (Philippians 2:1-8), is the antithesis of feeding the ego.

A warning for you to consider: Christians currently lead this nation in divorce. Eighty-five per cent of these divorces are initiated by women, many of whom are fed up with their husbands gorging on **informational insight** but failing to develop the humility and love of Jesus. We encourage you men to flee any faith community where the Bible is taught as **informational insight**. If you're not being corrected and rebuked so that you might grow in Christ-like character qualities, you may find yourself rejected by your family because they can't take your arrogant, spiritualized sense of superiority any longer. If you choose to stay within a faith community that feeds you facts but calls for neither repentance nor course correction in your life, you're being controlled by a depraved mind which is ruling your soul. Perhaps if you have to lose your wife and family you'll get a clearer picture of where you stand with our Lord.

Maybe you're presently not part of the religious establishment. That doesn't mean that its spiritual instruction through academic methods is no longer a familiar attraction for you. If you're satisfied with **informational insight** into the Bible, then know that you're most likely complacent about your need for Christ-like character transformation. Biblically-based discipleship requires discussion, application, and follow-up which provides any correction that's necessary until a person is pursuing, growing in, and living out our Lord's love and character qualities and motives.

Another warning for you to consider: In your conversations with other Christian men,

make sure you aren't deceiving each other through spiritual discussions which just involve exchanging informational insights. In other words, you spout facts at each other but have no testimonies of Christ-like transformation or answered prayers. You'll know you're helping each other be transformed when repentance is also part of your relationship. When you aren't hiding your iniquities from each other through pride or fear, and are mutually dedicated to Christ-like transformation, humility will be the aroma of your hearts—and sincere rebukes from others will be cherished. Rebukes by brothers in Christ, by the way, take great pressure off your wife and family.

If you're married, your wife and family should be the first to confirm that transformation into increasing Christ-likeness is taking place in you. Becoming more like Jesus isn't something you can just talk about as much as you demonstrating it first in your home. Growing in the character of Jesus begins with humility and is exemplified through love. If your wife sees you accepting rebukes from other men, especially older men of wisdom, it gives her hope that you have a heart that's humble enough to love her and your children as Christ would through you.

Mike & Sue