

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 2 - LESSON 16

The Loss of Our Hebraic Roots:
Attack On Jesus's Victory: Pietism and Ascetism
Attack On Jesus's Victory: Self-mortification
The Attack On Jesus: Veneration Of Mary and The Saints



Restoration Ministries International

Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz

www.Restorationministries.org

Section 2 Lesson 16

The Loss of Our Hebraic Roots:

Attack On Jesus's Victory: Pietism and Asceticism

Attack On Jesus's Victory: Self-mortification

The Attack On Jesus: Veneration Of Mary and The Saints

The Loss of Our Hebraic Roots

Attack On Jesus's Victory:

Pietism and Asceticism

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are”

(Matthew 23:13,14).

“Church Fathers” such as **Origen**, **Justin** and **Augustine** powerfully marketed Hellenism in Christendom. Because they had been steeped in Greek philosophical thought before they converted to Christianity, these men didn’t hesitate to draw upon unbiblical sources to formulate their own mix of Christian and Hellenistic thought. Grievously, their combined influence fashioned a new theology infused with Plato’s dualism.

Chances are, *you’ve* been impacted by their powerful clout yourself, as far more of contemporary teaching leads to Plato than to Jesus!

Origen in particular epitomized the dualist pursuit of “holiness” at the expense of the flesh. Rather than being subjected to temptation with women inquirers, he castrated himself! Yet his extreme example of denying the flesh

stirred others to exercise **asceticism**. Hardship was exalted, as were poverty and fasting—in fact, any practice that denied the flesh was a sure indicator that you were on the path of holiness.

Further evidence of the intrusion of Plato into Christianity was the practice of **pietism**. Individuals withdrew into the wilderness with others of like mind in order to escape from “evil” everyday concerns. There they could focus on spiritual “good” matters without distraction of the “flesh”. Those who secluded themselves away in monastic life were held in special reverence.

The impact of asceticism and pietism on the Church can’t be overstated, for it stands in complete opposition to the Hebraic root of **community**. Key to the sons of Abraham was a sense of relational responsibility as called-out ones — an **interconnectedness** that has bonded the Jewish people through centuries of dispersion and persecution.

What does mutual responsibility entail? Jesus defined it this way: ***“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends”*** (John 15:13). An example of willing self-sacrifice is Abraham’s rescue of his nephew Lot (see Genesis 14). At the risk of his own life the patriarch took action to “lay down his life” on behalf of another.

You might not be called to risk life and limb for another, but you are commanded to meet the needs of those who are

dear to our Lord's heart. As you ponder God's declaration through the prophet Isaiah, ask yourself how *you* are following through as His heart and hands:

*Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to **set the oppressed free and break every yoke?** Is it not to **share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?** (58:6,7).*

Mutual responsibility that responds with *action* on behalf of another is a Hebraic foundational stone upon which Jesus has been building His Church. You can't walk in the 54 "one-another" commands of the Newer Testament by living in a cave!

Jesus announced to His disciples the criteria for welcome at the Judgment Throne (see Matthew 25:31-46). This passage offers genuine responses of love to those who can't repay your kindness, and apperceives Isaiah's words with which His hearers were very familiar.

In contrast, Hellenism thrust upon the Church an ideal of isolation *away from* the daily responsibilities of life that bring followers of Jesus directly into contact with unbelievers.

With whom did *Jesus* spend the vast majority of His days? The common "sinners" of His day who knew they needed forgiveness! Sharing His life-giving truth with sinners by coming alongside them was the purpose behind His great commission (see Matthew 28:18-20).

Withdrawing from this Kingdom purpose was blatant disobedience—"another gospel". The Hebraic people experi-

enced life in all its dimensions because they knew God was the source of all their needs. "Spirituality" meant passionate involvement in service to God and to humanity. All that God had created was designed to be enjoyed within His holy boundaries without shame or guilt.

Personal withdrawal contradicted the community participation that exemplified the Hebraic outworking of faith. You may remember in Lesson 8, *Representing the Father's Care Through Action*, we discussed the Hebraic view of faith as evidenced through actions that help others. (See James 2:14-26 for God's perspective on *faith*.)

Hellenist dualism, on the other hand, focused on a metaphysical misunderstanding of spiritual devotion and piety. Even today, isolating yourself to contemplate God's holiness means you're more "pious" than those who put feet to their faith in obedient trust. Activities, occupations and pleasures in the physical plane are "worldly" for many Christians. They feel guilty if they enjoy that which our Lord has made for them to receive with grateful hearts.

You're probably surrounded by church-goers who practice asceticism to some degree. Think about the people you know who pride themselves on what they *don't* do: they *don't* smoke, *don't* drink, *don't* go to movies. They feel good about themselves because they're not contaminating their lives with sinful behaviors. But this self-righteous arrogance is the demonic trap of Hellenism: **self-justification**.

Paul addressed this same self-righteous pride that plagued the Hellenist followers of Jesus in Colosse. They, too, had confused true holiness with avoiding certain behaviors (see Colossians 2).

[For more on self-justification, see our video series or script [Certain Of What We Do Not See, #7, Satan's War Against Us: Schemes and Strategies—Self-Justification & Lawlessness](#)].

Think about the influence of pietism:
Many Hellenist church-goers are content to confine the “expression of their faith” to the supposedly “holy” church building for one hour a week.

There is a definite *disconnect* with the plastic Sunday-morning smile when you're among other like-minded pietists, if the other 167 hours of the week are devoted to self-interest!

Do you see the Hellenist influence behind this deceit? The building in which people gather is no more holy than your home or your workplace! Being called-out to serve God's purposes in obedient trust is not a matter of location but of **ongoing relationship in Him** in which you represent His loving concern for all of mankind. To live otherwise is to believe the lie of Hellenism.

The practice of **celibacy** is also rooted in the dualism of Plato. Since Greek thought portrayed the physical realm as evil, the human body represented a constant source of temptation and sin. Marriage, far from being the holy and honorable sacred covenant of the Hebrew Bible—“*He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord*” (Proverbs 18:22)—took on a negative connotation. (The Hellenist Marcion even forbade his married followers sexual intimacy!)

The joy of sexual intercourse between husband and wife was given to Adam and Eve *before* the Fall. God ordained for

couples to experience physical intimacy as foundational to their covenant union.

From our Lord's perspective:

The marriage covenant should reflect in the *physical* dimension the intimacy which the couple claims in their *spiritual* Covenant with Him.

In other words, a married couple's love relationship with their Lord should pour out in the love relationship of their marriage.

Church history demonstrates how Greek dualism contorted the biblical Hebraic expression of intimacy within marriage. Hellenist philosophers spawned the ideal of the young virgin woman and the celibate ascetic monk whose vows of chastity illustrated the supreme denial of “evil” sexual desire. Thus, centuries later, revisionist writers would claim that Mary, the mother of Jesus, could never have birthed the children listed in Mark 6:3 as His brothers and sisters. Instead, these were spiritualized as cousins rather than the offspring of Joseph and Mary's union.

From Greek dualism also emerged the heresy of **gnosticism**, which was vigorously confronted and condemned by both Paul and John in their epistles. Gnostics pursued stages of secret knowledge in order to free their spirit from contamination of the flesh. They denied the humanity of Christ. A holy God could never have become evil flesh. As a result, they presented a fable far different from the historical reality of Jesus as offered in the Gospels.

By focusing wholly on the spiritual realm, a gnostic could fill his life with otherworldly pursuit and strive thereby to draw closer to God. In true dualist pattern, **priests**, who were supposed to be the example of holiness to their

flocks, imitated the celibate Christ. By vowing to deny themselves the pleasures and responsibilities of intimacy in marriage and family life, they set themselves apart from identifying with the “common laity”.

This is why over the centuries clergy have been exalted over workers in other occupations. Whether married or single, clergy represent to many church people their **intermediary of holiness**. They expect their clergy to live faultlessly in a manner in which few of the churchgoers are willing.

That pressure has wreaked havoc on the marriages and family life of many Protestant clergy as adultery and divorce have proliferated. Among Catholic priests, homosexuality pervades seminaries and pulpits. God never intended for *one person* to represent His holiness to everyone else in a faith community! This practice is what God despises as Nicolaitanism (see Revelation 2:6,15)!

What is your view of piety? Describe how you see piety as a reflection of your relationship with God.

How would you describe a holy life that is pleasing to God? How does your life match the criteria you described? How does it differ?

**The Loss of Our Hebraic Roots
Attack On Jesus’s Victory:
Self-mortification**

“Do not handle, do not taste! Do not touch!’ These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence”
(Colossians 2:21-23)

Because of God’s evaluation of His creation, “*It is good,*” the Hebraic people viewed the world through a very favorable lens. Even though sin had come into the world through deception and disobedience, the universe had been created by a holy and loving God who had humanity’s best interests at heart. Our Hebraic ancestors were not in bondage to a dualist dichotomy.

Because dualism *is* an underlying dimension in Christian practice today, we continue to remind you:

Many of the extremes of self-denial and personal penance that later entered the church were founded on the Greek polarity between the physical and the spiritual.

The ascetics mentioned earlier were readily identified by **self-mortification**. They hoped that by vigorously subduing the flesh, they could free themselves from the evil they perceived in the physical realm and draw closer to spiritual perfection.

Paul rejected the practice of self-mortification in his day because he understood very well that it “*lacks any value in*

restraining sensual indulgence.” Choosing to subdue your flesh in the vain hope that you’ll draw nearer to God is futile. The only way to escape “sensual indulgence” is to flee from it out of *love for Jesus! You must yearn for Him more than your flesh yearns for gratification in ways that defy God’s boundaries.*

Imposing extra-biblical rules and traditions as *obligations* only serves to agitate the sin nature. Certainly Jesus saw through the futility of the Pharisees’ attempt to put behavioral fences around the good and righteous commands of God (see Matthew 23:13)!

This admonition has particular bearing today. Since Roman Catholicism instituted forced celibacy on its clergy, sexual abuse and immorality have plagued its clergy for centuries. As far back as the 1980’s one Catholic newspaper wrote that the Roman Catholic Church in the United States had paid over \$400 million dollars in out-of-court settlements for its clergy’s sexual misconduct.

Recent continuing scandal involving priests and young boys have brought to light the failure of celibacy to draw individuals “closer to God”. (How can those who are engaged in sin represent Jesus to the people they’re teaching?)

Although self-mortification isn’t common among Protestant clergy, they’ve fared no better in the Hellenist system that has singled them out as a special class. The result of pedestal isolation has been rampant adultery and divorce to such an extent that clergy vocation is a leading occupation for divorce in this nation. The self-admitted adultery rate even among clergy in some “conservative” denominations exceeds 50%.

Hellenized pietism and self-mortification have been deeply embedded in the history of Christianity. In essence, these practices have provided a means for *self-justification* by which a person endeavors to earn salvation through his own merits. They are part of the schemes and strategies that Satan uses to keep followers of Jesus from living in freedom.

It’s critical that you understand the insidious impact of self-mortification and its spawn, self-justification. So many today in Christendom are trapped in its snare believing they are serving God when, in fact, they are entrapped in a demonic strategy.

Why is it so important to your faith journey that you understand the insidious impact of Hellenism on Christianity? To the dualism-influenced theologians, the humanity of Jesus *detracted* from His divinity. Because He took on flesh, which was evil, they taught that His sacrifice on the cross was incomplete. So other means to achieve salvation were developed. This included self-mortification and the sacraments instituted by Church councils.

The position that denied Jesus’s substitutionary atonement for sin was maintained within Roman Catholicism until the convocation of Vatican II in 1963. Up until that time, a person was declared “accursed” if he believed that the crucifixion of Jesus was sufficient to pay the penalty for his sins. It was necessary for a penitent to fulfill certain works assigned him by the priest in the Sacrament of Penance in order to be absolved of his sins.

Are you aware of the Hellenist root of contemporary observance of Lent? Asceticism and self-mortification are the epitome of denying yourself earthly

pleasures in order to identify with the suffering of Christ. Historically, the more you mortified your flesh, the more pious you were esteemed.

Men of previous centuries would travel throughout Europe flagellating themselves with whips. Today, people often “give up” certain food treats or television viewing as a form of self-mortification so that they can show themselves to be holy before God through their own meritorious acts.

The *love* that motivated Jesus Christ to sacrifice Himself for the sins of mankind has largely been obscured. In its place have appeared those who display great pietistic zeal outwardly but fail to demonstrate love for their neighbor on a day-to-day basis. Man’s tradition has continued to overcome the pure truth and freedom that the Word of God offers in union with Jesus.

Many Protestants who embrace counterfeit gospels plunge into the same trap. When Satan convinces them that their repentance and confession of sins are not enough for forgiveness, they start down a futile path of doing good works to become more acceptable to God.

They fail to realize that this mindset places them squarely in Satan’s strategy. They become *performance-motivated* like the Pharisees whom Jesus called “Hypocrites!” They feel good about their religious activity as they see themselves doing more good works than others are. That’s Phariseism!

A word of exhortation:

The video and script we recommend earlier, ***Certain Of What We Do Not See, #7, Satan's War Against Us: Schemes and Strategies—Self-Justification & Lawlessness***, discuss at length the impact of man’s pride that

lays behind self-justification and mortification. Satan would like nothing more than for you to strive in vain through your own merits to earn salvation!

Do you use any form of self-mortification as part of your faith walk? (Yes) or (No)? If yes, what do you do?

Describe in depth how you experience God’s acceptance of you. If you’re plagued by a sense of rejection by Him, how do you respond?

Describe what you think Jesus means when He says, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). How is this made real in your own life?

**The Loss of Our Hebraic Roots
The Attack On Jesus:
Veneration of Mary and the Saints**

**“I am the LORD your God...
You shall have no other gods before Me”
(Exodus 20:2,3).**

As the church moved away from its Hebraic roots, the basic doctrines of God

as the Creator of the universe, omnipotent and all-wise, were still affirmed, but only in a *theoretical* rather than a personal sense. By the early 4th century, the gathering of followers of Jesus in their homes as extended spiritual family had just about vanished.

The impersonal “church building” replaced the relational intimacy that had so characterized the early Church. It became socially and politically expedient to attend public services, and righteousness in daily living turned into a non-issue. The reality of the ever-present God degenerated into a holy concept instead of the uniquely indwelling Lord and Counselor.

As a result of dualism, focus on the divinity of Christ was overemphasized, while His humanity was understated. The emphasis on His divinity led the organized church to present the incarnate Jesus as distant and impersonal, beyond the reach of mortal man.

Since Jesus seemed unapproachable, dualist influence developed doctrines regarding His mother, Mary. Revisionists taught that, in order to bear the sinless child Jesus, she herself must have been *immaculately conceived* (i.e., not by human means) by her mother. Thus “The Feast of the Immaculate Conception”, still celebrated by Roman Catholics today, endued this humble and obedient Jewish woman with a glory that is reserved for the Incarnate Son of God alone.

As mentioned earlier, dualism impacted doctrine to the point of contradicting Scripture. Alleging that Mary lived in perpetual virginity, revisionists distorted the biblical account that Joseph “*had no union with her until she gave birth to a son*” (Matthew 1:25) to mean that they *never* enjoyed marital intimacy.

The siblings of Jesus, as well, would have been clearly understood from Matthew’s eyewitness report:

Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t His mother’s name Mary, and aren’t His brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren’t all His sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things? (Matthew 13:55-56).

Devotion to Mary expanded into an *intermediary* role. Stretching by far the meaning of Jesus’s commission of her care to His apostle John as a son, devotees latched onto her role as *their* mother as well in a spiritual sense. Surely she could convince her Son to answer the prayers of those beseeching her! (A movement today among a number of Roman Catholics even purposes to raise Mary to the role of co-Redeemer with Jesus.)

Once again the Older Testament example of warning to *flee idolatry* was ignored. Elevated to the title, “Mother of God”, Mary was placed *alongside* Jesus to share in His glory—imitating the same pattern of the disobedient Israelites who added devotion of the “Queen of Heaven” to their worship of God (see Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17-25). Again, the biblical truth of Jesus’s words was ignored: “*No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6).

As the Gospel penetrated regions heavily populated by pagans, the church was exposed to a pantheon of gods depicted with human qualities. Veneration of false gods was transferred to followers of Jesus who had been martyred for their faith and were called *saints*.

This term is used frequently in the Older Testament, for example 1 Samuel

2:9; Psalms 16:3, 30:4, 52:9; Daniel 7:21,22, and many more references. Apperceiving the use of this word, Paul made abundantly clear that *all* followers of Jesus are counted among the saints! (See Romans 15:31; 1 Corinthians 14:33; Ephesians 6:18 as well as dozens more!)

Not content to honor Jesus alone as the only One worthy of praise, Christians appropriated sites that had been devoted to pagan worship and converted them to hallowed ground for particular “saints”. Relics that had supposedly belonged to these individuals were collected and cherished.

Leadership of the Greco/Roman church developed a formal array of “saints” to whom Christians could intercede. Cities adopted their own “patron saint” as did various trades. Jesus was displaced as the only Mediator between God and man.

The truth voiced by Jesus was spurned: “*My Father will give you whatever you ask in My name*” (John 16:23). No longer were believers encouraged to trust in the **Holy Spirit** to intercede for them (see Romans 8:27). With Jesus and the Holy Spirit removed from the central role in the life of believers, the Church no longer experienced the limitless resources of Christ in their midst. Rather, they were held captive by human reasoning to the confines of their mind and the decepts of idolatry.

Describe your prayer life. Note especially how you see God hearing and answering your prayers.

Do you know anyone who has diminished the Lordship of Jesus by praying to saints or attributing miracles or answers to their intervention? How do you respond to these individuals?
