



If you're *genuinely* born again but have been taught within nominal Christianity, you need to change venues. Over the centuries as the academic teaching format of Hellenism permeated Christian instruction, learning became an impersonal means to convey information. A way of life through the Holy Spirit that is made possible by personal role modeling and experiential learning was spurned in favor of impersonal lecturing. *Teaching* in nominal Christianity is conducted by those who have never experienced the Way by which our Lord's first followers lived. And learning more and more Bible content is heralded far more than doing what it commands. **If** you're *genuine*, don't allow yourself to be sedated by just learning more about the Bible.

Something you may want to be aware of: When we began following our Lord Jesus in the 1970s, there was a vicious publishing war going on within Christianity. Supported by many seminaries, the predominant view of one side was that the Bible just needed to be preached. Supportive relationships within a faith community were optional and unnecessary. On the other side, the side we have fervently taken, is that mutually supportive relationships are primary in developing Christ-like character as presented in God's Word especially through the 54 one-anothering verses in the Newer Testament. Supportive mutual discussion leading to application is a powerful mandate in the Bible. Most of the commands in the Newer Testament are given in the plural for the *genuine* to mutually apply, so supportive close relationships are essential. You must have supportive fellowship if you are to live out the commands that identify you as belonging to our Lord Jesus. Please confirm with the Holy Spirit if what we're sharing is true.

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant... All the [gifts] are empowered by one and the same Spirit, Who distributes to each one individually as He purposes" (1Corinthians 12:1,11).

We'll have more for you in our upcoming Abides about the cooperation of spiritual gifts in fulfilling our Father's purposes to His glory. Even though anti-Semitic theology has done much to minimize and even eliminate spiritual gifts, the gifts are promised to *genuine* followers of Jesus in the Scriptures (1Corinthians 12:1-11). And undergirding mutual cooperation of spiritual gifts is developing relational harmony within your fellowship family out of grateful love for your Lord and for them as your brothers and sisters.

✠ **A reality for you to consider when it comes to relational harmony:**

Make sure Paul's exhortation is true for you as *genuine* in pursuing the command to "be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Realizing this goal requires each person to ➤help each other grow in the character qualities of our Lord Jesus, and ➤confront any attitudes and actions that are contrary to our Lord and His commands.

You may have noticed that these two Biblical mandates don't exist throughout much of Christendom. Christianity fails when it comes to emphasizing Christ-like relational development. Yet, developing harmonious relationships in accordance with God's Word is absolutely necessary for authentic fellowship. And for the *genuine* to experience true biblical fellowship they must have unwavering cooperation in developing Christ-like relationships!

✠ **A reality for you to consider when it comes to spiritual gifts:**

While Mike was counseling religious leaders during our retreat ministry, a particular pastor called him. This man's elders couldn't convince certain people in the congregation to complete a spiritual gifts survey, much like the one we have on pages 46-55 in our book, **God's Instruments For War — Discovering & Coordinating Spiritual Gifts As Weapons of War-**

fare. Mike asked the pastor to make a list of attendees who didn't complete the survey. Then he told the pastor to ask the elders to privately write down names of the various congregants whose salvation they doubted. Later when they compared the lists, the pastor and elders found that the names on both lists were almost identical. Mike then told the pastor that people who aren't *genuinely* born again can't fill in the survey because they don't have the Holy Spirit within them. Mike then advised the pastor to focus on the real need: to evangelize the nominal who were already in his congregation.

“[Together] continue to work out the salvation of yourselves with fear and trembling, for it is God Who works in you [plural] both to will and to work for His good pleasure”
(Philippians 2:12,13)

Working out your salvation together requires harmonious discussion leading to application. Have you noticed that the commands our Lord has given to His own primarily focus on mutual Christ-like character development by means of loving, supportive relationships? No one is born this way. But mutual Christ-like character development is possible for the *genuinely* born again *if* they mutually apply our Lord's commands to their lives and do this out of grateful love for the One Who gave the commands. The doorway into this collective transformation is **repentance**. Repentance means that you replace sinful attitudes and actions with what our Lord Jesus would do. Each time you respond in repentance to a wrong you've done against our Lord's ways whether by word or deed, the Holy Spirit enables you to become more like your Lord Jesus.

Repentance requires that you *“take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (2Corinthians 10:5). Within the framework of mutual Christ-like character development, each *genuine* follower of Jesus replaces previous sin-based attitudes and practices with a Bible-based way of life as the Spirit enables.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, His good and well-pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2)

The *genuine* must mutually have hearts which desire to walk worthy of our Lord, a phrase which appears numerous times in the epistles. Then they'll be equipped to help each other in being *transformed by the renewal of their minds*. Again, an essential core purpose for our Lord's commands for the fellowship of the *genuine* is **mutually supportive, Christ-like character development**. The process for this is twofold, requiring both •instruction leading to application of our Lord's commands, and •loving and earnest admonition when necessary (Matthew 18:15-17; Colossians 3:16; 1Thessalonians 5:14). All the *genuine* in the extended spiritual family of a fellowship must be mutually committed to **Who** they are seeking to become like in the world and with each other. And the character quality which most exemplifies our Lord Jesus in His followers is this: ***“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends”*** (John 15:13).

Mutual transformation into the love-based character qualities of our Lord spring forth from this one command, ***“Therefore all things that you want others to do to you, you also do to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”*** (Matthew 7:12). This one verse is the foundation for equitable, impartial treatment of each other as you walk as extended spiritual family. It's also the basis for experiencing mutual loyalty. Anything less will result in wounded emotions.

Use the following Discerning Levels of Relationship with those you care about in your faith journey. This guide will help you •discern the depth of your current relationships, and •guide you in mutually

committing to Christ-like character development. When you're done, ask yourself if you've intentionally sought out (or avoided) deeper friendships. Why? And what needs to happen between you and the Holy Spirit for deeper levels of relationship to develop?

DISCERNING LEVELS OF RELATIONSHIP

[adapted from the Institute in Basic Life Principles Seminar]

There are four different levels of relationships (from shallowest to deepest):

Level 1. Acquaintances

These relationships are based merely on occasional contact, such as people you may encounter at work, shopping, out for a walk, and even those in your faith community you just see once a week. You each feel free to ask general questions like, “How are you?” or “What do you think about this weather?”

Level 2. Casual Friendships

These relationships are based on common interests, activities, and concerns such as participating in a sports league or a Bible study. With these people you have the freedom to ask specific questions about their opinions, ideas, wishes, or goals, and they are comfortable asking you the same.

(Mike discovered in congregations where he used this survey that less than 15% had a relationship with each other beyond Level 2. It was extremely rare to encounter Level 3 and especially Level 4 relationships.)

Level 3. Close Friendship & Fellowship

These relationships are based on helping each other establish certain life goals and achieve particular aspirations. You have the freedom to suggest mutual projects you can work at together to reach the life goals and purposes you're seeking. However, you're not held accountable to each other to follow through on what you discuss or say you're going to do.

Level 4. Intimate Friendship & Fellowship

This is the deepest relationship, and is non-optional for the *genuine* if you are to experience authentic fellowship. That's because it's based on mutual commitment to each other's Christ-like character development. You're in frequent contact with each other, and you have the freedom and mutual responsibility to admonish each other when attitudes or actions are unChrist-like and violate our Lord's commands.

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Several essential identifiers must be in the life of the *genuine* for you to experience Level 4 relationships with each other. Through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, there must have occurred in each of you:

1. Complete repentance resulting in a clear conscience. (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Acts 2:38)
2. A distinct reduction of fear in your life, and a humble and vulnerable openness to input or correction from each other. (1John 4:18,19; Matthew 10:28; James 4:6; Ephesians 4:1,2)
3. A strong, responsive desire to bear fruit for the glory of your Father out of loving gratefulness to our Lord Jesus, and a trusting obedience by grace to do Father's will. (Matthew 3:8; 7:16; John 15:1,2; Mark 12:30; Matthew 7:21-27)