

# **The Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage to Salvation**

## **Preparing For Pentecost**

### **The Spirit's *Rhema* Has No "If—>Thens" & No Pros and Cons**

*Please prayerfully take your time going through each section of this lesson and consider both the information and the questions. Your heartfelt responsiveness and determination matter to our Lord, so don't try to complete an entire lesson at once. Also, you'll reap greater benefit if you go through each lesson with others close to you.*

***"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).

Can our Lord say it any more clearly? He our Creator and we as humans just don't think or act the way He does! In order to do your Father's will, you must have His Spirit's guidance (*rhema*). Each *rhema* is like a portion of your Father's wisdom that's *specific for you*:

- This might be a specific direction He gives for you to take action.
- Or, it may be a particular insight into a situation you're encountering, such as the famine King David faced as recorded in 2Samuel 21:1.
- Or, His *rhema* could be a certain character quality of Jesus that our Father wants to instill or strengthen in you at that time.

Again, it's essential that you recognize that our Lord's thoughts and ways are *not at all* like yours. That's why so many who follow Jesus and live under His Lordship have found that the specific piece of wisdom the Spirit gave them was *nothing* like their first inclination. In fact, His *rhema* was often opposite their initial tendency or urge!

From our heavenly Father's point of view, doing His will requires your ***obedience-based trust***, just like that of our father in faith, Abraham. When the patri-

arch heard from God, he acted. Your obedience-based trust flows from a heart motive of grateful love, a responsiveness that's determined to know and by His grace to do your Father's will no matter what the cost.

### **No "If—>Thens" & No Pros and Cons**

Without a deep dependence on *rhema* from the Spirit, most Christians have ***outcome-based*** lives. They pursue *desired outcomes* for their own purposes or fulfillment but have little or no concern if what they want is our *Father's will*. If you're outcome-based rather than obedience-based, your thoughts run like this: "If I do this (whatever 'this' is), then such-and-such will happen." This means you make your decisions by weighing the *pros* and *cons* through your own rationalization.

***Outcome-based Christians take only those actions that benefit them in some way. In fact, they refuse to act unless they perceive a positive outcome for themselves.***

The spiritual pit for these individuals is that when they use if—>then, pro and con reasoning, they're relying on ***vain imaginations***—intentions and considerations that are the exact opposite of having your Lord's guidance. Our Lord's remedy for this misplaced confidence:

***"[We] cast down vain imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and we take captive EVERY thought to make it obedient to Christ"*** (2Corinthians 10:5).

- Would those who know you well consider you a *rationalizer* when it comes to determining our Lord's will for you? Do they detect you relying on *if—>then* and/or *pro and con* reasoning?

*“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).

Relational support is vital if your faith walk is to be **obedience-based**. When you're seeking the Spirit of our Lord to know what He would have you do and/or not do, you need others with you in Christ who can come alongside and confirm His will. (This can help safeguard you from giving in to your *own* will or preferences which might override doing His will.) Isn't this the process Jesus is giving His followers, above, as He promises to be with two or three as they seek what to do or what not to do?

**If your life purpose is to love and serve Jesus as LORD of all your life and plans and hopes, then your most important and deepest relationships are people who will encourage you to be obedience-based because they have the same heart desire as you do to bring glory to your Father.**

[For further discussion of various types of relationships, see Teaching E-mail 29. *Are Your Friendships Spiritually Authentic?*; and, Lifebyte 42. *Ministering Spiritual Freedom To Others.*]

- What is the nature of the close relationships in your faith walk? Are you helping each other discern the Spirit's will and encouraging each other to be immediately obedient?

*“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers”*  
(Romans 8:28,29).

One thing which anyone who has lived dependent on the Spirit of our Lord for guidance discovers is this: His Spirit changes you even as He is guiding and empowering you in your loving obedience to our Father's will. Paul speaks of the ongoing, transforming work of our Lord's Spirit during your journey to your salvation:

*“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, **are being transformed into His likeness** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit”* (2Corinthians 3:18).

*“He who began a good work in you **will carry it on to completion** until the day of Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 1:6).

The Spirit's ongoing transformation and guidance of Christ's own are wonderfully captured as a prayer in this worship song:

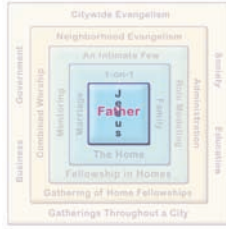
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.  
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.  
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me,  
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

<[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J\\_dOKo0jFA8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_dOKo0jFA8)>

**Examples of the Spirit's *rhemas* to us**  
*“This is the way; walk in it”* (Isaiah 30:21).

We'd like to share some examples of the various *rhemas* the Spirit has given us as we've followed our Lord Jesus. From the moment we were born again we together committed ourselves by His grace to be **obedience-based**. Through

the indwelling Spirit, our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus are the most important relationship and central focus of our lives (Matthew 10:37, 38). We hope these accounts will bring joy to your heart and encourage you to both seek His *rhemas* and record them to inspire other people!



- When Mike became a follower of Jesus in 1977 he was a career officer and pilot in the Navy stationed onboard a helicopter aircraft carrier. One night while he was at sea and getting ready for bed the Holy Spirit impressed on him to get dressed and go to a certain part of the ship. When he got there he saw a young man standing alone staring out at the dark waves. Mike drew near and asked why he was there. The man admitted that he was suffering from bleeding bowels and the next day the medical staff was going to fly him to a hospital. The Spirit directed Mike to put his hand on the man’s shoulder and pray.

The next morning, flight operations were held up because of bad weather so Mike was talking with his flight deck crew. The young man from the previous night bounded up to him in front of the other guys and said the doctor had checked him again that morning—and that he was healed. He then ex-claimed, “*Jesus has healed me!*” The astonished onlookers asked what had happened, and he told them how Mike had prayed for him. The group then asked Mike to tell them more about Jesus. For the next two hours as the storm raged, he was privileged to tell them about the love and power of his Lord.

- Another time aboard the ship, one of the brothers named Dave came to Mike. “I’m up for re-enlistment and I don’t know if the Lord wants me to stay in or get out. Would you pray for me?” As Mike prayed for Dave over the next few days, he kept hearing in his spirit, “Tell Dave to toss a coin.” When Mike was finally able to see Dave, he found that the Spirit had also been telling him to toss a coin. So Dave tossed a coin, confident that the Lord was directing his path: “*The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD*” (Proverbs 16:33). Obediently accepting the Spirit’s deci-

sion, he got out and began a new season in his life.

- One day off the coast of the Philippines the two chaplains onboard came to Mike. “We’ve been praying for you and believe that the Lord wants you out of the Navy serving Him fulltime.” The other brothers on the ship were praying for Mike and also had a “witness in their spirits” that the Spirit had spoken through the chaplains. Mike resigned his commission.

- A woman close to us had been divorced after having one child. Her doctor had told she couldn’t have any more children, and she was devastated. Months later the Spirit told Sue to make this woman a baby blanket. Sue was surprised but followed through, saying nothing to the woman. Shortly afterward this gal and her ex-husband gave their lives to our Lord, remarried each other—and had three more children!

- We were living in San Diego when Mike left the Navy. He had applied to an interdenominational seminary in Massachusetts, wanting to learn more about why there were so many denominations and sects dividing Christians. Sue was prompted by the Holy Spirit to begin a prayer journal, stirring her to write down distinguishing features of the house we were to purchase in Massachusetts. On our first day of house-hunting, in a way only He could guide us to it we found the exact home that contained everything He’d revealed to Sue while we were in San Diego.

- Enroute to Massachusetts we stayed in a campground in Wyoming in which you put your fee in the box and select a site. After dinner we strolled the campground and noticed that all the other sites were filled. Just as we were passing by the campground entrance a station wagon drove in with a family inside. The Holy Spirit told Mike, “Go help them. They belong to Jesus.” Running up to their car he told them that all the sites were taken but they could share our site since we were sleeping in our van. Grateful, they drove to our site just ahead. As we followed we could hear them praising God for answering their prayer for a campsite. That night as Mike talked with the dad, he found that the man had researched the same seminary to which we were heading. It was as though God Himself spoke through that man, encouraging us to go forward!



- The day before we found our new house Mike's brother offered to co-sign a mortgage with us since Mike was going to be a fulltime student without a job. That very night Mike prayed for the Spirit's guidance, and as he opened his Bible his eyes fell on this: "*better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away*" (Proverbs 27:10). We both had a witness in our spirits that the Lord was telling us not to use Mike's brother as a co-signer. The next day the president of a local bank, who subsequently became a close friend in the Lord, gave us a mortgage.

- Several months after moving to Massachusetts we faced a test of our faith. Our home in California hadn't yet sold so we were paying two mortgages. (Remember, we were jobless at the time!) Then came the day when both mortgages were due and we had about \$8 in the checking account.

Mike began to wonder if we'd somehow missed God's will. Meanwhile, Sue chuckled in delight: "Just think, we *have* to depend entirely on our Lord to do something!" She then handed Mike a devotional article she'd just read that morning which chronicled a young 18th century Naval officer and his wife as they sailed across the ocean. A fierce storm arose and the wife shook in terror. Her husband, however, prayed calmly. When she asked how he could stay calm when they were in such danger, he pulled out his sword and put it to her neck. "Are you afraid of me?" "No," she answered, "for I know in whose hand the sword is." "And I," he responded, "know in Whose hand the storm is."

As Mike finished reading he began to pray. The phone rang. Before Sue could answer it, the Holy Spirit told him that it was our realtor in California and our house had sold! Sure enough, that was so. The realtor also told us that the buyer wanted to move in right away and pay advance rent, which paid the mortgage of the house we were living in. Because the sold house went into escrow, we didn't have to pay that month's mortgage on it—and since the sale didn't close until January (in a year in which we had little income), we ended up not having to pay any capital gains either! Impossible situation, you say? *Mighty God*, we answer!

- After Mike had finished seminary we were visiting Sue's father, who lived in a rural town in eastern Connecticut. While at the seminary

Mike had met a man who was caretaker for a vacant halfway house located in that same town. So Mike went to visit this man while Sue remained at her Dad's. The premises of the halfway house were in an awful state of disrepair, and the caretaker told him the board of directors was going to meet in a few weeks to consider selling the property.

Several days later Mike was asked to come to Boston to interview for a position for a ministry headquartered there. During the conversation the interviewer mentioned the need for retreat centers in the area of Connecticut where Sue's dad lived. Mike wrote to the board of the halfway house informing them of this need, and they asked if we'd consider sending them a resume. Besides sending the board a resume, we gave a copy of the board's letter of invitation to the elders of our faith community in Massachusetts. After spending several days in prayer, they unanimously had a witness in their spirits that the Lord was sending us to turn the empty halfway house into a retreat center.

A few days before we were to go to Connecticut to meet with the board of the halfway house, a man from our faith community approached us. "When you get to Connecticut you'll meet a man named Norm Swenson who will help you in your ministry." The morning of our meeting with the board we sat with a group of clergy who had been meeting monthly at the facility for several years. The group's leader was *Norm Swenson*, a man who indeed helped us greatly during our 10+ years at the retreat center.

- When we accepted the invitation of the board of directors to turn the halfway house into a retreat center, they gave us \$40 in cash and \$700 of unpaid bills and told us they'd pray for us. Money was very tight, and whatever we did receive we put into repairing the place. Three months into our work a Christian brother from Mike's days in the Navy called. "Mike, I've been praying for you, and the Holy Spirit told me to tell you to get health insurance. Don't you have any?"

We didn't. We'd looked into it and knew how much it would cost, far more than we had access to. Our friend told Mike, "I'm going to send you money for three months of coverage." When the money arrived we almost hesitated because there seemed to be more critical needs for the funds than health insurance. But we fol-

lowed through and applied. The day after the coverage went into effect Mike put a chain saw into his knee. A week later Sue broke her finger and had to go to the emergency room to get her wedding ring sawed off. Within a month our son was hospitalized with a kidney infection.

*Immediate obedience* became our byword for obvious reasons!

- A few years into our retreat center ministry we were in need of transportation besides our farm truck. As the Holy Spirit prompted her, Sue began writing in her prayer journal different features of the vehicle we were to get. A few weeks later we were visiting some older friends in Massachusetts. They mentioned they were trying to sell a car which had all the features the Holy Spirit had given Sue. The price they were asking was very reasonable, and Sue included it in her prayer journal. A few days later a check *for the exact amount* came in the mail from a brother in the Lord with whom Mike had served in the Navy—someone who had no idea what our need was but was obeying the Spirit's prompting!

- Mike had promised his mom that he would care for her if she became incapacitated. Several years after leaving the retreat center it came time to move home to fulfill that promise. Mom had previously broken her hip so it was impossible for us to get her into our minivan; we needed a low, 4-door sedan. At the same time, we needed to reprint *Demolishing Strongholds*. With \$300 to our name we needed to come up with \$23,000. Our family recommended that we take money from Mom's estate to buy the car, but we told them that our Father in heaven wouldn't get any glory that way.

As we began to pray about these needs, our Lord prompted a businessman from Texas to call. He wanted to buy our 800-number because it spelled the name of his business! That weekend a jeweler from South Carolina we'd never met who had corresponded with us sold a large diamond. Our Lord impressed on him to send us the proceeds! Add to that a few other "out of the blue" responses and within a few weeks we had all the funds our Father wanted us to have to buy a car *and* reprint *Demolishing Strongholds*!

- We'd like to explain a little about how we got the message we share, "The Hebraic Restoration." In the fall of 1993 we left our retreat ministry of almost 11 years. At that time we had no idea what we were going to do next.

The years of conducting retreats, counseling clergy, and keeping up the sixty acres of farmland had taken a toll on our marriage. We were being held together by a thread.

Three days after we agreed with our board of directors to leave the retreat center, our friend Bert Schlossberg called. Bert had moved to Israel five years earlier with his family and was visiting relatives nearby. He told us that God had awakened him early that morning to pray for us and that he needed to see us. As Mike hung up the phone, he asked the Lord why Bert was coming. He heard the Spirit of our Lord say, "Bert has a message for you from Me." Through the Spirit's clear revelation we were to live with Bert's family outside Jerusalem.

Several days after Bert's visit we received a letter from a man we'd never met. He wrote, "Do you know that you're going to Israel on a prophetic mission? Please fax me anything the Lord shows you while you're there." A few weeks after arriving in Israel we took part in a prayer conference in Jerusalem. A pastor from Memphis whom we'd never met walked up to Mike and put his hand on his shoulder saying, "The Lord wants you to know three things." The first two he related were answers to prayer concerns that we had told no one else about. Then the man continued, "The Lord wants you to know that He's brought you here to return to the United States with a prophetic message."

After we'd been in Israel two months we were seeking confirmation of God's will whether we should stay there or return to the US, after Mike had received a job offer from a noted ministry in Jerusalem. One morning as he was reading the account of Jesus delivering the man at the Gadarenes from a legion of demons, he noticed this verse: "*Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you*" (Mark 5:19). We had a prompting from the Holy Spirit that God might be sending us home.

A week later Mike came upon this verse: "*O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, Who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper'*" (Genesis 32:9). We had the same Spirit prompting. Later that day friends told us, "We've been praying about whether you should stay in Israel or return to the US, and God has impressed on our spirits that you are to go home." Thus we had our *rhema*, and confirmation as well!

Next to our front door we've hung a plaque with this verse: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). During our final days in Israel we went away on a two-day retreat to confirm that we had learned all that our Father wanted us to share back in the States. On the second day Mike got up very early and went into a small chapel to pray. He sat there heavy with memories of past failures and shortcomings, and poured out his heart to the Lord feeling totally unworthy to share the Hebraic foundations that the Father was restoring to His called-out ones. The Holy Spirit directed him to a small devotional book on the seat next to him. Reading the passage for that day, Isaiah 6:8, Mike knelt down and sobbed, "You do this to everyone you intend to use!" That plaque is an ongoing reminder from the Sender for the two of us to keep on sharing.

### **The Spirit's *Rhema* Allows Only A "Window Of Grace" In Which You *MUST* Act**

Those who live in loving relationship with Jesus as their Lord recognize that His Spirit's guidance provides them a "window of grace", a limited period of time in which to obey. Whenever people in the Bible either through outright defiance or what we call "fiddle-faddling" missed that window of grace, they suffered for their *disobedience*.

Over the years we've encountered a large number of Christians who thought they had all the time in the world to obey what the Spirit had made clear they were to do. But to their sad dismay their delay resulted in confusion and disheartedness.

Painful repercussion surrounds the misguided who mistakenly believe that when the Spirit is calling them to do something, He affords them the slack to do it on *their own terms* and in *their own timing*. Far from it! How tragic for them that their failure to respond immediately in obedient trust brings about these consequences:

**Their disobedience means they have NO TESTIMONY to our Father's glory. Added to this, they DEFAME HIM with their excuses of why they didn't follow through in what the Spirit told them.**

In fact the disobedient often become the biggest whiners, always complaining about their life circumstances or blaming others for their discontent. *But this is only a mask to cover their failure to trust our faithful Father and immediately obey His will in the grace and power of His Spirit.*

Please don't be one of these people! We hope the testimonies of *rhema* given to us will encourage you to realize how important the Spirit's guidance is and your responsibility to quickly obey the One Who loves you so much.

**Your obedience as Christ's own  
results in testimony to  
your Father's glory.  
Is there any other purpose in life  
as worthy as that?**