




Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character

The Sin of Claiming To Be A Christian While Failing To Belong to Christ

Have you ever evaluated your relationship with your heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus? We're not referring to what you think you did years ago through either a religious ritual or a guided response from someone else. Rather, we're asking you how our God or anyone around you who has been born from above *would know* you truly belong to our Lord. If this relationship really matters to you, the Bible offers **specific indicators**.

Everything in this relationship begins with how dearly you cherish and trust our Father and Lord Jesus and are responsive to His indwelling Spirit. That grateful devotion to His loving faithfulness as expressed in covenant union with Jesus then penetrates your heartfelt commitment within your home and your extended spiritual family. The outward flow of the Spirit within each relational priority is unmistakable as He works through and in and around you!

The Sequence of Relational Priorities	
<p>First Priority</p> <p>Your relational connectedness with your Father and your Lord Jesus originates from your heartfelt <i>love</i> for and absolute <i>trust</i> in Them.</p>	
<p>Second Priority</p> <p>Within your home you foster increasing Christ-like character through turning to His Spirit, resisting your sin nature, and establishing your way of life on His Word.</p>	
<p>Third Priority</p> <p>With Jesus as your Head, your home fellowship family is His interdependent body which He uses to advance His Kingdom in ongoing warfare against the power of Satan.</p>	

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:15,16).

Priority 1. Father and Jesus

Your Love and Trust Produce An Unstoppable Desire to Advance the Kingdom

Your relationship with our Father begins with you fully recognizing your own sinful depravity and hating it. Through His Spirit you become convicted of not only particular sins in your life but of your very sin nature which separates you from His holiness. You realize that you DO deserve the wrath of this God you've violated! It's only then when you repent that you can appreciate the amazing love of Christ in taking as your sinless Substitute that awful punishment you deserve, and the incredible grateful joy of His indwelling presence as you become a new creation born of the Spirit.

If you don't fully grasp what our Lord Jesus accomplished for you on the cross, everything else that would be encompassed in this Lordship relationship with you is a moot point. The intensity and magnitude of your appreciation of Who He is and what He has accomplished on your behalf is the basis for you to lovingly obey His commands in the power of the Spirit.

A few days ago we were watching the animation biography of Samuel Morris, an episode in the Torchlighter DVD series from Voice of the Martyrs. The trust of this young man from Liberia, Africa in His relationship with his heavenly Father led him penniless from his homeland to New York City and

ultimately to a Christian college in Indiana —no small feat in the waning years of the late 1800s. Samuel’s uncompromising trust changed the lives of everyone who encountered him during his brief 20 years on earth. We were fascinated and admittedly envious of the depth of loving trust Samuel had as seemingly impossible needs arose and he confidently and unfailingly called upon His Father to meet them however He saw fit. The *trust* that his Father would answer his prayers and guide his path was as unswerving as the *emunah* of the patriarch Abraham.

David Wilkerson accurately describes the Hebraic understanding of this type of trust: *to fling oneself off a precipice*. “It is to be like a child who hears her father say, ‘Jump!’ and she trustingly obeys, throwing herself from a height into his waiting arms.”

Christians who spent any time with Samuel were soon convicted that they knew *about* God but lacked the trust that would evidence they *belonged to* Him. Many were born again on the spot as they hungered for that kind of intimate relationship they saw Samuel enjoying with his Lord.

(You can purchase the DVD by going to: <http://www.vombooks.com>;
or for a brief summary of his life go to:
<http://www.taylor.edu/about/heritage/samuel-morris/the-samuel-morris-story.shtml>)

Have you ever considered what a glorious image of *relational connectedness* that Jesus is calling His own to as you’ve read John 15:1-6? Sometimes a portion of Scripture can seem so familiar that you gloss right over what the Spirit is trying to tell you *now* in it! As a branch will die if it’s disconnected from the vine, that greatly do each of us who belong to Jesus as our Lord NEED that life-giving spiritual “sap” running through us to fulfill His purpose: to bear lasting spiritual fruit in and through our lives.

Jesus adamantly calls His own to intentionally and steadfastly *dwell in Him* as their Source of spiritual nourishment in order to produce the kind of fruit that matters to Him: **“*Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me*”** (John 15:4).

When you see a branch producing a cluster of grapes, you have no doubt that the branch is connected to a vine which is firmly rooted in life-giving soil. The same is true when the power of the Vine, the Spirit of our Lord, flows through you: the fruit He produces in and through you will be obvious to others (Matthew 7:16).

Keep in mind that there’s an essential “if” factor in the directive of Jesus when we petition our Father: we must choose to remain in union with Jesus through His Spirit and respond with obedience to His commands. When those two elements are in place, the responses of our Father are such that His Name is lifted up as we are spiritually fruitful. And, our fruitfulness bears witness that there is LIFE in our trust relationship in Him, not just an intellectual agreement with a spiritual proposition: **“*IF you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples*”** (John 15:7,8).

Although Samuel Morris had been armed with relatively little theological training, he loved and trusted His heavenly Father in such a way that God’s Word came alive through his words and actions. The aroma of Christ and his intimate trust in his Father pervaded the environment of every conversation about his Lord. Would that many within contemporary Christendom experience

this *living faith* that transforms their own lives and impacts so profoundly the lives of others to look to Jesus!

Sadly, the complacent are satisfied with a belief system they can conveniently take off the shelf each Sunday and return unused during the week. But their compartmentalized approach to God parallels the “belief system” of demons (James 2:19). They too acknowledge the reality that God exists, but have no understanding of the Father-child relational trust which authenticates life in Christ.

One of the strongest indicators of your connectedness with our Lord Jesus is experiencing the truth of His promise, “ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” (See also John 14:14, 16:24.) Your subsequent testimony of His answers then brings glory to our Father.

Priority 2. The Home
The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Development

We’ve mentioned in previous writings an important truth: Most of the commands in the Newer Testament are written in the *plural* sense, not a singular one. In other words, they are written for a group of people to *put into practice together*, such as a family or the extended spiritual family of a home fellowship.

The concept of communal awareness that’s expressed through *collective cooperation* in applying God’s commands has been lost throughout self-absorbed western Christendom, and in particular, within homes. Throughout Scripture the pattern of *families* (especially *intergenerational families*) as the basic building block for spiritual development is obvious. Even the spiritual regard for one another as *brothers and sisters* implies a sense of belonging to and responsibility for one

another that is absent from most people’s thinking and practice.

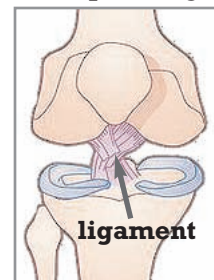
The “body” analogy between followers of Jesus and Him as our Head denotes a living organism: “*from Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work*” (Ephesians 4:16). The growth in love and purpose of that body begins in our own homes.

The imagery of the *whole* body and Paul’s use of the word “ligament” here is an important clue pointing to the *collective cooperation* needed within a family.

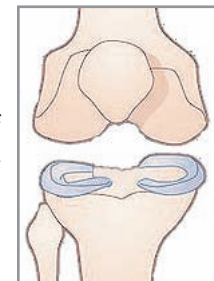
Your skeleton would be just a conglomeration of individual bones if it weren’t for the *ligaments*. Ligaments enable the bones to cooperate together in order to serve the entire body. Since your brain controls your body, you could also say that your ligaments are *responsible to your head* in causing the individual bones to cooperate together.

Individual Christians who are bereft of the essential cooperation of others who are living for Jesus in meaningful relationship are like a human body without ligaments. In this self-absorbed culture, even Christian husbands and wives too often place more emphasis on themselves as individuals than on the *relational connectedness* the Bible emphasizes. Part of this is because they haven’t understood the relational nature of the *Covenant union* our Father offers them with Him in Christ. Their concept and practice of “Christianity” has stressed religious serv-

Connected
&
Cooperating



No Connection
&
No Cooperation



ices and programs through which they acquire Bible knowledge. But they've failed to develop the depth of love and trust for God and for one another that authenticates their marriage relationship as our Father's children.

This relational chasm has significantly impeded couples from perceiving the *covenant nature* of marriage. Absent from the vast majority of marriages within contemporary Christendom is the *relational union* the Spirit of Jesus makes possible. While a husband and wife may put forth the effort to add to their Bible knowledge, so many founder when it comes to growing in humility and sacrificial love in how they treat each other. Is it any wonder that marriages among Christians are dissolving on pace with those of unbelievers?

If you're married, THE strongest indicator of your relationship with our Lord Jesus is that people see His ever-increasing character qualities through how you relate to each other.

When our Lord Jesus is the Head of a home, a husband and father can learn a lot from the steadfast determination of Joshua: *"But as for me and my household, WE will serve the LORD"* (Joshua 24:15). You must think collectively about your entire family. All of your Bible knowledge is pointless if you're not helping each of them live with Jesus as their Head and each other as interconnected body parts. (If you haven't done so already, we strongly suggest you go through the segments on the home in either our *Jesus in Your Home* video series or our written series, *Discussing How to Restore the Early Church*. [All are free at our website.] Make sure you use the discussion guides that go with each segment so you can glean the input from each person in your home.)

Priority 3. The Home Fellowship Family

- ***The Relational Interdependence That's Needed To Coordinate Spiritual Gifts For Mutual Edification***
- ***Weapons Of Warfare To Advance God's Kingdom***

Few followers of Jesus today really recognize the true purpose for the extended spiritual family gathered in home fellowships. Most home groups cater to the complacent who are looking for a social system of acceptance without commitment to Kingdom purposes. No way would spectatorship characterize the dynamic interconnected body which Jesus purposed and empowered! Collective cooperation and love-driven discipleship prepared these soldiers of Christ for both spiritual warfare and advancing the Kingdom (see Ephesians 6:10-20).

One of the spiritual giftings reported in Romans 12:8 is leadership, or literally, *taking the lead in diligence*. Genuine leadership within the Kingdom of our Lord might be called ***"redemptive coaching."*** The way in which you come alongside others to help them discern and fulfill our Lord's purposes flows out of your own life experience as the Spirit used others to train you. It's as if you were initially a "player" in the Kingdom and were coached (discipled) by older men and women who served our Lord. You've now matured into a player-coach who is fully equipped to disciple others as you effectively use the Word as your "playbook".

Kingdom living calls you to train others through the Word and testimony into a way of life that you have lived yourself. It's not a "secondhand" academic exercise of predigested facts that can be filed away into the brain's "knowledge compartment" and not put into practice. The commitment of mutual loyalty and Christ-like brotherly love brings

about an accountability to follow through. That's how you can lead those you're discipling through personal example as our Lord Jesus did: "*A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is **fully trained** will be **like his teacher***" (Luke 6:40). Jesus is THE example of a player-coach for everyone whom the Spirit empowers to lead.

Kingdom-minded leadership realizes that *each person* has a part to fulfill in advancing the Kingdom. The role of a leader as an elder shepherd/teacher was to develop and mature the interdependent cooperation that's needed to advance the Kingdom of God. Biblical elders led by training their flock to humbly cooperate as the body of Christ with forbearing love and zealous faith (Romans 12:10-12).

Paul stressed to the followers of Jesus in Corinth this interconnected responsibility to one another right after he affirmed the importance of mutual participation of their spiritual gifts: "*Now you [collectively] are the **body of Christ**, and **each one of you** is a part of it*" (1Corinthians 12:27; see also Romans 12:4-10).

The soul-searching question for each member of a fellowship family is not, "**How do I benefit by being in this fellowship?**" but rather, "**How are others benefitted by my participation and gifting?**"

Authentic fellowship flows out of the quality of loving devotion and obedient trust each person has with our Lord and heavenly Father. Out of the depth of that commitment they join forces with those in their home and with other Jesus followers because their heartfelt trust and love motivates each one to set aside any selfish motives that might prompt them to be part of the fellowship family. Again, if Jesus is their Head, then He has con-

nected them through their spiritual gifts (ligaments) to do His Father's will.

The words our Lord Jesus spoke to the apostle Paul capture the assignment of any of us who claim to belong to Him:

*"I am sending you to them to **open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God**, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are **sanctified by trust in Me**"* (Acts 26:17,18; see also 1 Corinthians 1:17,18).

Paul goes on to describe the fruit of his obedience to our Lord's command, the true indicator of one who claims to belong to Him—a repentance that is proved genuine by the deeds that follow:

*"I preached that they should repent and turn to God and **prove their repentance by their deeds**"* (Acts 26:20; see also Matthew 7:20, 5:16).

Individuals within a home fellowship family must set aside their personal interests if they are to be used by the Spirit in the body life our Lord envisions. His Spirit has brought them together intentionally to fulfill our Father's purpose and plan.

Collective interdependent care (Philippians 2:3,4) must replace self-centered individualist preoccupation if the body imagery our Lord uses is to become a reality. Humbly seeking the interests of others is a true indicator that Jesus is your Head and that His Spirit is empowering and guiding you to advance His Kingdom out of loving and grateful obedience to Him as your Lord.

Finally, to understand this critical transition from individual self-focused pursuit to a communal and collaborative cooperation we encourage you to watch

an old film classic, *Twelve O'clock High*. The movie focuses on the early stages of World War II in Europe and the development of Allied bomber squadrons to more effectively destroy enemy supply lines. In a rousing speech to the B-17 pilots the General reminds them that in order to successfully complete their mission they must already be *dead to themselves*. Their true strength lays in their resolute commitment to maintain the formation of aircraft so that together they can achieve their goal.

This resolve to the other interconnected body parts in the home fellowship family is what leadership must focus on developing so that each and all function as the living body of Christ.

(For a more complete understanding of home fellowships, see Section 4 of our video series, *Jesus in Your Home*; or download Lessons 45 thru 50 of *Discussing How to Restore the Early Church*; and read our book, *Pastoring By Elders*.)



The Interdependence of Spiritual Gifts

