

## Teaching E-mail

### *Prophetic Warnings From A Righteous God*

#### 46. Developing Spiritual Maturity in an Atomistic Age (December 8, 2009)

Dear Friends,

We want to share with you the steps that must be taken if we're ever to help succeeding generations become mature servants of our Lord in the Kingdom of God. That previous generations have failed in this is evident from the statistics we quoted in a recent e-mail. This chart was originally presented by Ron Luce in *Battle Cry for a Generation* and cited in *Mission Frontiers*, Sept/Oct. 2009, p. 36:

What The Next Generation Will Look Like

- Builders (born 1927-1945): 65% Bible-based believers;
- Boomers (born 1946-1964): 35% Bible-based believers;
- Busters (born 1965-1983): 16% Bible-based believers;
- Bridgers (born 1984 or later): 4% Bible-based believers.

You can see the dramatic downward trend in *Bible-based* believers in this nation. The consequences of forsaking God's Word have resulted in the wretched condition in which this nation finds itself.

Sue and I are particularly grieved because this trend has happened in our personal lifetime as "Baby Boomers". A little background material may help you see how this trend has taken hold, at least in our family. I (Mike) grew up among church-going relatives. We knew right from wrong, and family standards were enforced, especially while my grandparents were alive.

My Dad's mother made sure her family read from the Bible every evening at supper. But after that generation had passed away, something sinister happened to entice my relatives to not only increasingly tolerate sinful actions, but eventually to condone them.

The change was subtle. While my Dad's Mom was still alive, we went to her house for the key family gatherings—Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Fourth of July. After she died, the gatherings moved to her daughter's farm.

This holiday celebration pattern remained the same for several years until my aunt's son finished high school and began working. With his mother's support, and *against his father's wishes*, he moved his girlfriend in with him at his parents' house. Although the other churchgoing relatives gossiped about it among themselves, no one spoke up against this fornication. Everyone just kept going to the farm for the different holidays, overlooking the sin that was setting a rebellious example for others of this cousin's generation, and the next.

I remember telling my parents that we shouldn't support the immorality going on by just winking at it and attending regular parties there. I clearly recall their response. My Dad was silent, but my Mom answered, "We're family and we've got to stick together."

In the years to follow, other relatives condoned their children living with boyfriends or girlfriends in fornicating relationships. Eventually even homosexuality came into the family as an accept-

ed lifestyle. Each time I questioned the nonconfrontation of these young people, the women in our family defended the sin while the men remained silent.

Please note that Sue and I weren't *judging* them; we just knew that we too had sinned immorally, and *it wasn't right before God*. Bringing shame to Him through our sinful choices had stirred us to repent. And, by the way, *all of us* from these generations had occupied pews since infancy and were *still* regular churchgoers!

When Sue and I were born again in spirit and received by our Father into His Kingdom, we became even more "strange" in the sight of our relatives at the family gatherings. Any conversations I initiated among the guys that weren't dealing with sports or vehicles ended in silence. Sue gently tried to shift the women's chatter away from soap operas, sexually oriented movies, and celebrity gossip to little avail. Eventually, we just stayed away from the parties.

Let's pause here to review something that will help clarify why *so many men* are *unwilling to confront sin* in their family. In **Lifebyte 4. Blazing a Trail**, we wrote about the six stages of male development, adapted from *The Masculine Journey* by Robert Hicks.

The second of the six stages, the Phallic Male (*zakar*), recognizes the innate sexual drive of maleness that impels and motivates a man toward an intimate relationship. God puts 10 times the testosterone in males that He does in females. A man's true worship of God begins by not lusting after women; rather, he restrains himself for THE WOMAN our Lord gives him in covenant marriage. This is a crucial

stage in which a man begins to learn complete responsibility toward God.

The Phallic stage is God's classroom of self-control to train a man to fulfill all of his responsibilities. He must fight off the most powerful of biological pressures, his sex drive, for a twofold purpose: that he not sin against God and that he save himself for the covenant wife God would give him. Men who fail in their development of personal responsibility the Lord calls for during the Phallic stage have a difficult time the rest of their lives fulfilling their other God-given responsibilities.

Because of their parents' reluctance to confront immorality in their children, many both in my generation and in the next readily fornicated. To them it was normal, from the world's perspective. And since none of the generation preceding them was confronting them, they had no reason to turn from their sinful choices.

Yet this decision to co-habit has reaped sorrow in many of the couples who ultimately married. Emotional tension abounded within a number of these homes. Because the men had acted irresponsibly before marriage by giving way to their sexual desire, their wives had to lower their own moral standards, whatever they may have been. At any rate, these gals were no longer the treasured princess for whom their lover had to pay the price of matrimony to attain!

When a woman has given in to immorality without the commitment of marriage, seeds of doubt about her husband's love remain long into their relationship. This doubt about her preciousness to him sets up unholy gyrations between them. Ask yourself if you and your spouse have ever been caught in this web of relational destruction:

She feels he's insensitive to her needs or isn't emotionally protecting her. She questions, "Does he love me? >> He reacts to her coolness by becoming defensive or by withdrawing from her. >> She becomes convinced, "He really doesn't love me!" >> He attempts to prove his love, usually by buying her something. >> When she accepts the gifts, she feels demeaned because she recognizes that her husband is purchasing her favor. Inside she feels like a prostitute. It's at this point she takes her focus off her husband and begins to focus on home, TV, children, hobbies and activities. >> Feeling unappreciated and neglected, he finds a "lover" – another woman or exaggerated focus on work or other activities outside the home.

#### **A personal recommendation:**

If this scenario has played itself out in your own marriage due to premarital fornication, we know of only one way to break out of it: The husband must humble himself to ask forgiveness from both his wife *and her father* for having undermined his position in his daughter's life while she was still unmarried. There is no other path that will head you out of the quagmire that your fornication before marriage has caused.

**“What parents allow in moderation, your children will excuse in excess.”**

In the 33 years that we've followed Jesus, we've seen the same pattern I've described in my own family repeated in countless other families: ***Sin, especially sexual sin, is condoned by the women in the family, and it prospers because the men fail to confront it.*** The toleration of fornication allows for acquies-

cence to other sexual sin, whether addiction to pornography or participation in (or condoning) homosexuality in succeeding generations.

Decades of ever-increasing toleration for sin have brought this land to the point of God's chastisement. And, His finger of accusation is pointed directly at the men who failed to stand up for the righteousness of His Word.

To give you a deeper understanding of how unconforted sin proliferates evermore with each succeeding generation, let's review several important points discussed in **Lifebyte 62. *Does Your Marriage Reflect Your Covenant With Our Father?* (Lesson 2).**

God's Word affirms some very specific needs within a wife that her husband **MUST** provide:

- Relational security: A husband must uphold ALL of his biblical responsibilities in his home as protector, provider and servant-leader, never giving excuses or blaming others, especially his wife.
- Discerning peacekeeper: He must ensure that his wife does not give in to deception and bring anxiety, sin or rebellion into their home.
- Diligent leadership: He must lovingly counter her inclination to rule their home.
- Mutual respect and love: He is to treat her with consideration in attitude and action even as she is called by God to respect him with love.

It may surprise you that women are susceptible to the temptation to take control in their home. But Paul addresses the deception that fuels this: "*Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner*" (1 Timothy 2:14). In a broader application of Eve's deception the apos-

tle writes, “*But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ*” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Adam isn’t innocent here! He was standing with Eve when she decided that giving way to self-interest overrode loving obedience to her God. Not only did he fail to speak up for God; he also allowed himself to indulge sin as well.

The consequences of the couple’s willful disobedience have sorrowfully impacted marriages ever since. Because Eve gave way to sin and Adam didn’t confront it as a righteous voice for God, a curse has been placed on all marriage relationships that can only be overcome as husbands fulfill their biblical responsibilities to stand firm as spiritual protector of their family.

Eve’s penalty for distrusting God’s wisdom and exercising independence that violated Him was painful in several dimensions. Not only would producing children become a painful ordeal for her, but her companionable relationship with her husband would be in turmoil as well: “*...your desire shall be for your husband [for his position of rule], and he shall rule over you*” (Genesis 3:16).

As a husband, you need to keep in mind the core sin nature of your wife that makes her vulnerable to temptation: • **Satan finds it easier to deceive her than you in domestic matters** • **her desire is to rule her husband** • **she is prone to exercise independence from you and your leadership at home.**

Eve had exercised independence from God’s command, and had “ruled” over her husband by handing him the forbidden fruit to eat. Adam’s sin, and the sin all men have subsequently been prone to, is their unwillingness to speak up and

confront their wives about unrighteousness. Instead, in the path of Adam, they give excuses and/or blame others. Remember, even before God created Eve from Adam’s side, He had given the man a specific command: “**You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die**” (Genesis 2:17). Standing firm in obedience to His Creator’s only prohibition would have forestalled the just and righteous penalty of disregarding His will.

That Eve picked the fruit because the devil deceived her into thinking she’d be like God in knowledge (Genesis 3:5) doesn’t mean that she couldn’t have been prevented from eating it. At that point, even if Adam hadn’t spoken up earlier while the serpent was chatting with her, he still could have confronted her with her sinful willfulness and rejected the proffered fruit. He failed on both counts, overcome by his own sinful desire to partake.

Let’s be clear here. In order for a woman to rule over her family, a man has failed to fulfill his God-given responsibilities. Do you recall Adam’s pathetic response when he was later confronted by God? Already entrapped by earlier sin, he refused to humbly entrust himself to the mercy of God. Instead, he gave excuses, cast blame and ducked responsibility.

That pattern continued over the centuries, even to the throne of Israel with King Ahab’s juvenile dependence on his wife, Jezebel. By hiding behind her control, he abdicated his role of king as well as husband. In that void, Jezebel was able to dominate the tribes of Israel through her schemes and witchcraft.

Like a spoiled child, Ahab had only to whimper to her and he knew that she’d come up with a way to meet his desires —

as unrighteous as they were. And through her evil influence, their son Omri would become a king who “*did more evil in God’s sight than any of those before him*” (1 Kings 16:30). Are you willing by your silent passivity as a husband and father for your children to excuse more evil than you ever tolerated in yourself?

As with Jezebel, many women take over whenever their husbands falter in their biblical responsibilities. Subtle weapons of *manipulation* and *control* are wielded by women who rule their homes. How might you recognize this unrighteous weaponry? She responds with *passive-aggressive* behavior, that is, she pouts or scowls when she doesn’t get her way. When her husband corrects her or disagrees with her wishes, she may withhold affection from him or act in ways she knows will irritate or anger him.

Please read **Lifebyte 62** with your spouse for a fuller explanation of how the sins of Adam and Eve, and the subsequent curse God placed on them, may be affecting your own marriage.

In summary, two issues are bringing about the downfall of so many marriages in this nation:

1. The widespread ignorance throughout Christendom of the curse God has placed on husbands and wives through their inherited original sin nature.
2. The lack of determined mutual cooperation needed by a couple for their marriage to be sanctified into the love and character of Jesus.

We discussed in **Teaching E-mail 45** how Satan manipulates Scripture to tempt people into the kinds of sin that God states keep people from inheriting His Kingdom (see 1 Corinthians 6:9,10). For decades now Satan has been deceiv-

ing people into believing that they’re fine with God — even though their lives are unrighteous before Him. Yet those who offer prophetic warning from God’s perspective are mocked or ignored...

***“When the wicked thrive, so does sin, but the righteous will see their downfall”*** (Proverbs 29:16)

We are daily confronted with awareness that the downfall of this nation is ever so close. Sadly, the older generation who are still in position to pass along biblical moral standards to their grandchildren have retreated. The silence only condones and perpetuates ever-evolving standards that have no foundation in the unchanging Word of God.

In our book, *Restoring the Early Church*, we introduced three stages every civilization goes through so we could clarify where the US is at this point in time. According to sociologist Carle Zimmerman, the three stages are: Trustee Family, Domestic Family, and the Atomistic Family.

For a complete discussion of these stages we refer you to the following:

1. Restoring the Early Church, Introduction
2. Hebraic Home Fellowships Must Produce Godly Generations, Part 2, Whose Kids Are They?
3. Teaching E-mail 36. Are You Dancing Around Each Other? (February 12, 2008)

For this Teaching E-mail we'll review a brief understanding of these stages.

Most cultures, including a Bible-based society, begin as a "**Trustee Family.**" This is patriarchal, with self-sacrificial men in authority as servant-leaders who serve the interests of the people as a whole. The truths that these wise, older people pass along from generation to generation are highly valued. The governing authority, normally a patriarchal structure, is led by the oldest and wisest men.

The next stage of development in a civilization is the "**Domestic Family.**" This occupies a middle ground between the authority of elders in the Trustee Family and the self-centered individualism of the Atomistic Family (below). A husband and wife assume major responsibility for raising their children according to the values that they believe are right. Support from the older generation is far less than in the Trustee Family, however, with grandparents providing minimal influence in the character development of their grandchildren.

The lack of dedicated involvement by grandparents in the lives of their children and grandchildren ultimately leads a civilization's decline into the "**Atomistic Family.**" The final stage of a nation, this most accurately describes the family structure of the United States, and western Christendom as well.

In the Atomistic Family each person perceives himself as a distinct unit, dissociated from the interconnected family responsibilities commanded in the Bible. Individual rights are emphasized, while family responsibilities are minimized or neglected. Whereas some level of self-sacrifice was the norm under the Trustee and Domestic families, complete and unabashed selfishness characterizes the

Atomistic family. Each member does all he can to have all his wants met, including going into debt to gratify himself.

The sense of *personal responsibility* that marked the Trustee and Domestic Family is replaced in the Atomistic structure by *victimization* ("It's not my fault; someone else is to blame!") and *entitlement* ("Why can't I have \_\_\_\_\_ or do \_\_\_\_\_? I deserve it!").

How has this self-centered, self-catering mentality impacted Christianity? The gospel is *marketed* toward the blame/victimization mentality of the atomistic American culture: "If I come to Jesus, my life won't be so lonely, so poverty-stricken, so anxious. God loves me just the way I am, so I don't have to change by leaving behind my sinful ways. I can add Jesus on to however I want to live."

The atomistic nature of our current culture shows little regard for others. Rather, relationships come and go, mostly because, among the young in particular, they live like a swarm of antagonistic insects engaged in mortal combat — encouraged in this by the violence and promiscuity they're submerged in from early childhood through the media.

In fact, democracy and the Atomistic mindset are intricately intertwined. *Self-interest* is the driving force behind both. The Founding Fathers understood clearly from the Bible that, "*When a country is rebellious, it has many rulers*" (Proverbs 28:2). In other words, the rebellious are never satisfied, always wanting leadership that appeases and satisfies their narrow self-focus. Because of this tendency, the Founders established a *republic* led by older, wiser men. How far from that intent has contemporary democracy devolved — into a popularity contest driven by countless opinion polls.

The root cause of the decline and ultimate downfall of a nation can be traced back to the failure of one generation to pass along and enforce biblical values to the succeeding generations. The bitter fruit of this failure is seen in the destroyed marriages, and therefore, families. Our Father desired that the marriage covenant represent the Covenant we have with Him. Yet with only 4% of the youngest generation trusting Him as Bible-based believers, no wonder His blessing has been missed.

To be more pointed, we believe our society's demise is coming about due to the failure to both recognize and confront the original curse inherited by both men and women. In this nation the battle for male leadership has already been lost. Men have abdicated their roles in the family. Their ineffectiveness in society isn't far behind.

Sociologists declare that the public education system of this land is "totally effeminate." The strident voices of women shout across media airwaves that men are to blame for the world's ills. And, like Eve, women are being seduced into pursuing their wants at the expense of a peaceful home — and *God's will* is never being considered.

It's little wonder that denying yourself and picking up your cross each and every day (Mark 8:34-38) as a sign of your commitment to Christ as Lord of your life has diminished to a self-centered goal for Him to make your life carefree and pleasurable. That's certainly the message being passed along to your children and grandchildren.

## Developing Spiritual Maturity in an Atomistic Age

***"If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His Father's glory with the holy angels"*** (Mark 8:38).

As we continue to share the Hebraic foundations, we're readily aware that we're promoting a biblical Trustee Family lifestyle among people from today's Atomistic culture. Only by God's grace can this transformation in families come about through His servants who are living to please Him and serve His purposes.

That transition is neither easy nor readily accepted in western Christendom today. Hindrances besides the obvious antagonism of the world system are many. These include the widespread, unbiblical influence of clergy who satiate people with prepackaged programs and entertaining, "lite" sermons that never stir their hearts to repent.

Church-system backed clergy nullify the prophetic voice of God by which He would warn and exhort His people. "Keep the boat from rocking" more adequately describes the role of so many clergy so that people will return each week to feel good "just the way they are." Yet where is the clarion call that sounds the alarm over tolerance for sin within the flock? When was the last time you've seen someone removed from fellowship because they refused to turn from known sin? Or do you think there are none in your faith community who fit that condition?

Men live in abject fear of confrontation, fear to speak forth God's truth in

their families and elsewhere, fear of being excluded if they live to bring their King glory. This fear has resulted in the impending chastisement coming on this nation. Generations of men have violated the clear warning given to us, "*Fear of (wo)man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe*" (Proverbs 29:25).

Thousands of grandfathers and grandmothers alike are trapped in fear of their own children: "If I speak up, my children won't let me see my grandchildren. Or, they won't come over any more and I'll be left all alone."

**Paralyzing fear arises whenever an older generation loses sight of the biblical responsibility that they must leave this earth having done all they could to point the way to and through the Narrow Gate for their family.**

**If we're to reverse the trend that led us into this Atomistic period, older men especially must stop being the "Ahab's" of today. They need to begin to role model for their sons in particular a lifestyle of caring for others more than for themselves.**

**Grandfathers must pick up the mantle of Abraham and begin to fulfill their God-given responsibilities "to direct their children and their household after them to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just" (Genesis 18:19). This requires role modeling a Godly lifestyle as they apply biblical truth to life situations, teaching it to the next generation, and confronting those who refuse to live by these values.**

**We who yearn for the Hebraic foundations to become a way of life must be willing to do whatever is**

**needed to see the Trustee Family restored. Wives and children need to see distinctly humble men — fathers, grandfathers and spiritual shepherds — who courageously apply the Bible in their homes and faith communities with loving, self-sacrificing leadership.**

**And, as mentioned earlier, these men must not be reluctant to confront those in their care to live in accordance with the commands found in the Word of God.**

If spiritual shepherds and grandparents are to be true to Jesus, we need to purpose to live the commands of God's Word ourselves. His Spirit has empowered each of His own to do this by His grace, and to repent when we fall short! Just as important in our Lord's sight, we must also teach the joy of obedience to our family and faith family so that "*things will go well with them as they do what is good and right in the sight of our Lord*" (see Deuteronomy 6:7,8; 12:28; 2 Timothy 4:2-4).

If you're a grandparent or parent with adult children and are plagued by apprehension about confronting them, we encourage you to read **Discussing How To Restore the Early Church**, Lessons 41 thru 44. Or, download Segments 17 thru 22 of our **Jesus In Your Home** video series. The same information is needed if you desire to serve as a spiritual shepherd of our Father's children. You need to not only understand your biblical responsibilities to those in your care, but also recognize the consequences should you disobey and lead others astray.

***"If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me"* (Mark 8:34).**



Few in an Atomistic society care about the commands of God. Self reigns supreme. Even within Christendom, biblical moral standards have been disregarded by many families for several generations. During the half century since the end of World War II the Atomistic family has proliferated in the U.S. There are now two or three generations of “Christian” families who have lost the biblical understanding of both personal obedience to God and their spiritual responsibilities to their children.

Because of the individualistic, pleasure-bent pit of the current retirement mentality, younger parents no longer benefit from the support of their own parents as they struggle to impart Christian character into the next generation. We realize how much more pressure is put on parents today to raise a godly generation when they have so little support.

### **Some Wise Guidance for the Older Generations**

You must begin with God’s Word as authoritative truth to live by in Christ. Go through it thoroughly with your spouse to determine where you have sinned by failing to live by and impart to your children the commands of God. Consider honestly if you raised them to be “churched” or Kingdom-minded, daily serving the interests of King Jesus.

After you’ve asked God’s forgiveness, then ask forgiveness from your children and grandchildren for having neglected to demonstrate *the way of the Lord* to them (Genesis 18:19). Then purpose together to apply God’s Word to your daily lives.

- As a grandfather or father, make sure you press on to lovingly confront any unbiblical behaviors and attitudes

that pop up in those under your care. *Continue to use the Bible to guide your family in honest discussions that will lead to applying it.* • As is apparent in His Word, the responsibilities of an older person in God’s sight are more stringent and demanding than for the younger people. • Nowhere in the Bible is anyone called to retire from their God-given family responsibilities. In fact, these get greater the older and wiser you become. • You and your wife should be striving for your marriage to be the hallmark of Christ-like love and character for the rest of your family to emulate.

### **Do you have a cynical or mocking spirit?**

In the process of helping yourself and your family members grow in their sanctification into Christ’s character, determine if you may have developed an underlying cynical and mocking spirit in your life. These will impede your own growth into Christ’s likeness and therefore hinder your ability to lead your family in His steps.

You can readily hear the mocking cynicism in the apostle Thomas’s words, *“Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe”* (John 20:25). In light of the overwhelming testimony of others who had seen Jesus, the apostle’s words revealed years of entertaining an underlying disbelief.

Cynicism with its accompanying mocking attitude can form if you’ve been in comfortable-for-you religious surroundings for most of your life. No one has ever challenged or confronted you about your sin of complacency. You’ve most likely done everything you can to be accepted as a pleasant person to be around. After all, in Christendom, isn’t

“pleasantness” the most cherished Christ-like attitude? Know from Christ’s perspective, however, that an outwardly pleasant person may himself be tolerating personal sins as well as the sins of others who call themselves Christian.

If you’re the parent of grown children, take a close look at the condition of their lives. When you observe wrong decisions, choices or even attitudes in them, do you mock them as if only they were at fault? Has it ever crossed your mind that your lack of biblically-based training of them and your failure to confront them has enabled them to get this way? Are you ready to face whatever happens and use the commands of God’s Word as you step in and help?

### **Some Wise Guidance for the Younger Generation**

If your parents failed to raise you to make the Bible a *way of life* for you and your family, forgive them and press on. Don’t let the arrogant attitudes of the self-serving Atomistic culture, *blame and victimization*, keep hold of you. You need to forgive from your heart, and begin to pray God’s blessing on your folks. If you don’t forgive *them*, your Father won’t forgive *you* (Matthew 6:15). You’ll recognize the consequences of unforgiveness and unwillingness to honor your parents because of the emotional heaviness that remains around you. Many of the events in your life never seem to work out right, and it seems that you and your family are missing out on the blessings God would shower on you.

In the absence of any discipleship by older people, you still need to flee all vestiges of the Atomistic mindset you may have developed. The Spirit of Christ

and His grace is sufficient to change you. But you must desire to flee, no matter what it costs you, everything that is not of the character of Jesus or hinders you from your responsibilities in His Kingdom.

If you’re married, you need to help each other rid yourselves of the generational darkness that may have come down through your families. This may include demonic strongholds and other sinful attitudes and behaviors you received from your respective parents. If strongholds are involved, make sure you help each other fill in with righteous ways the ruts of old attitudes and behaviors after you’ve demolished the strongholds in Jesus’ Name.

These are steps we ourselves had to take once we realized that our Father intended that our marriage covenant represent the joyful, steadfast union of what we claim in our Covenant with Him. It wasn’t always easy! In fact, it was often downright painful. But in time our love for our Father and for each other motivated us to be militant about having our marriage shine with the character of our Lord Jesus. It’s a lifelong process, so don’t be quick to give up!

As we’ve recommended frequently in our writings, getting up together early in the morning is the most effective means for a couple to succeed in helping each other in their mutual sanctification. Get to sleep earlier if you must, but set aside some time each morning for prayer and applying His Word together.

### **Put aside all deceitful manipulation**

Another trait that’s readily recognizable in this culture is that people manipulate others for their own gain. This is

the outgrowth of the *self-centered motivation* that is the driving force behind the Atomistic Family period. Another way to describe deceitful manipulation is that this generation has learned to purchase favor from others by their actions— “I’ll do thus-and-such for you so that you’ll do thus-and-such for me.”

This motive, however, is the exact opposite of what the Bible commands. Our Lord wants us to give without concern of benefiting ourselves. We need to respond in regard to the needs of others without any desire for personal recognition or payback. In fact, Jesus will judge *each of us* according to what we do to bless those who can’t reciprocate (Matthew 25:35-36).

### **Some Wise Guidance for All of You**

Begin to help each other climb outside yourself and your own feelings and come to grips with how you affect others. See yourself through the eyes of those close to you. Solicit feedback with a readiness to hear and follow through. Ask those who know you well where you fall short of the character of Christ. Prayerfully explore His Word regularly to discover how you may be violating His commands and not living in ways that please Him (2 Corinthians 5:9).

In everything *cooperate together* in the changes our Lord wants to make in you. Don’t get upset over the darkness you discover in each other. Rather, confess it, turn from it, and walk in the light of His ways until the character of Jesus is formed in each of you (1 John 1:7).