

## Teaching E-mail 58

### Do You Dare Ask Yourself?

*“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32)*

(December 26, 2011)

*“He has sent [us] to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1b).*

In Teaching E-mail 30, *Obedience May Mean “Pack Up And Go!”*, we wrote about the ways our Father made our path clear after we returned from Israel with the Hebraic foundations in 1993. When we arrived back in the States, I (Mike) continued to be plagued by a sense of failure for not having known these Hebraic truths earlier. I kept thinking of the 5,000 people who'd come through our retreat center, and how much more helpful I could have been to them in the Spirit if I'd understood from a biblically Hebraic perspective.

Then one night I had an intense and very real dream:

“I was brought to Mount Horeb, the Mountain of Desolation. As I stood on the mountaintop, I heard the Lord say, “Mike, I've desolated you for several years, pruning away that which was not like my Son. Listen! I never wanted you to know these truths before this time. Now, GO and **FREE the captives!**” He then told me to wake up Sue and tell her about my dream.”

Sue: As Mike woke me up, I was having a dream too! I was on a mountaintop that was a flat, half-moon shaped plateau. Behind me was darkness, with steep, jagged rocks that represented my past. But ahead of me, light was growing brighter and brighter, like the dawn! I heard a voice saying, “Press on into the light. You can look side-to-side to see who's going with you, but you can't go

back.” Mike and I both knew that God had given us these dreams to encourage us to press on and share what He is restoring.

In this Teaching E-mail we'd like to discuss various kinds of “captivity” we've observed during the seventeen years that we've been sharing the Hebraic foundations. Quickening your awareness of what forms of captivity keep people from experiencing the freedom that ONLY Jesus can give will help you as you come alongside others too.

If the various captivities of people were a physical prison, they could more readily discern their plight. Being locked behind steel bars makes it apparent they're not free!



But the prison in which so many are held captive is within their *mind*, making it difficult for them to perceive their bondage. Their inability to recognize their captivity is compounded by the fact that they've grown up in families who are also **prisoners of darkness**. Most are the offspring of at least two or three generations of spiritual and emotional imprisonment.



*“But their minds were calloused, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away” (2 Corinthians 3:14).*

So many people are born into emotional and spiritual prisons, and that's all they've ever known. Until they experience all that *Jesus alone* can do in them, they'll remain prisoners even as they sit through their religious services each week with their minds calloused over in dullness to Him.

**Faith communities are often a gathering of people who are held captive in the same spiritual and emotional prisons. They feel a kinship in their mutual captivity since no one has shown them it's supposed to be any different.**

Many in the United States, Christians included, are what psychologists term **social psychotics**. They protect themselves emotionally from those with whom they have daily contact, but openly share intimate details of their lives with people far away. Social networking has only compounded this problem. Techno devices impersonalize relationships, relegating the interaction to the selective information the sender wishes to share, whether through texting or Facebook. And, most of the information is "all about ME".

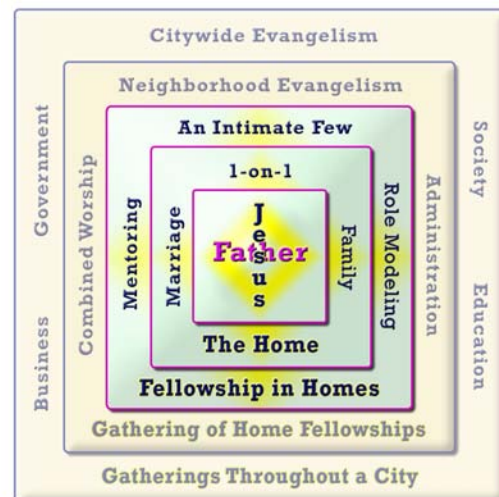
Sadly, this self-focus stifles the intimacy of responsiveness and mutual load-bearing. Limited, one-sided information is passed along; therefore what's exchanged is no more personal than watching the news. And, those spiritual and emotional captives in faith communities are never taught the redemptive tools they need to mutually support each other in becoming free in Him and *staying* free.

The most common hindrances to freedom generally fall into two categories. The first is the inability to free yourself from those *personal darknesses in your mind* that hold you prisoner. These are such things as a **habitual toleration for**

**apprehension** in relationships, often caused by **undemolished strongholds**; or **toxic memories** that haven't been healed; or being unwilling or inadequately equipped to **confront painful situations**.

The second area which keeps people from walking in the freedom that comes from living as Jesus's own is the **toleration for unbiblical faith practices**. Many of the practices which have been adapted into Christianity over the centuries have *pagan roots*. Rather than abiding by God's command to separate ourselves from the ways of pagans (2 Corinthians 6:17), many ecclesiastical authorities, beginning with the Roman Catholics, have modified and incorporated these practices to pacify the populace. Yet both God in His holiness and Scripture as His Holy Word are violated by this syncretism—and too few within the system have the boldness of His Spirit to question religious authorities. As Christian history has revealed, those who question unrighteousness are usually ridiculed and removed.

### Our Father's Relational Priorities



We know from His Word that our loving Father is a God of intimate relationships. That interconnectedness in Christ as His children begins with our love for

Him, then reaches out to people we encounter everyday (Luke 10:27). When we were finishing our research in Israel our Father gave us a pictorial image of His relational priorities for His family in Jesus. Our ministry is focused on the center three areas of the diagram above.

Our Father impressed on our spirits to help His children *live according to His will* in these three areas and *experience the freedom Jesus can give them* through His Spirit. To that end we labor so that you'll perceive how our Father would have *you* live as His child even as you reflect Christ-like love toward others. Our focus includes *freeing you from the captivity* that is blocking you from experiencing the freedom Jesus can give, and helping you to *do your Father's will*.

***“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”*** (John 8:36).

Let's delve into some of the personal areas of darkness and unbiblical faith practices in your life that are displeasing our Lord and keeping you from intimacy and obedient trust in Him. If you find yourself a prisoner to any of the various captivities we discuss, make sure in your heart that you're willing to question your own apathy that's holding you in bondage. It takes courage to ask the necessary questions if you want to be free. This is the important first step.

**1. Do you have the courage to ask yourself:**

***Would Jesus remained trapped in relationships that are plagued by unresolved apprehension and fear?***

- **Have you ever just asked the person who makes you uneasy if the two of you can confront why you're uncomfortable?**

**• Have you ever considered asking a third party whom you both trust to sit in and listen to both sides?**

As long as you have apprehension toward someone, you'll never be able to love them with the love Jesus would give them through you. Unless you pursue resolution to the apprehension, you're keeping yourself from representing Jesus to them as He wants to be revealed through you (Romans 14:17-19).

If the apprehension is occurring in your own home, it's all the more important that you confront it so that authentic peace can be restored (Psalms 34:14). Our Lord intends that your home be a sanctuary and refuge for each of you so that His Spirit can be at work in you all (Galatians 5:22). The first followers of Jesus were Jews, who understood from their forefathers the importance of *shalom bayit*, the peace of the home. Peace is always the soil that nourishes love (Ephesians 4:3).

(For more on removing apprehension, see our Teaching E-mail 18. *Our Gift To You*; Teaching E-mail 19. *Replacing Apprehension With Love*; Discussing How to Restore the Early Church, *Lesson 39*.)

The most consistent causes we've seen underlying persistent apprehension are *undemolished strongholds* and the *failure to confront toxic memories*. Fear of change can hold you back from freedom in these areas, but only your trust in the *power of Jesus* can demolish demonic strongholds and heal toxic memories so that Father's will can be done in and through you.

(For more on removing strongholds and toxic memories, see our Hebraic Article: Mutually Growing Christ-like Relationships—*A How-To Guide For Removing Hindrances*; The Way of the Lord, 34. *The Lordship of Jesus: Mutually Becoming More Like Him (Part 2)*.)

We've heard from several who've tried to give other Christians one of our articles on demolishing strongholds, only to have the materials refused. What you're finding at work is the *spirit of deceit*, especially as it produces reliance on *reasoning and rationale*. Because so many who are influenced by deception find support by joining other like-minded prisoners of deception each Sunday morning, they rationalize that they *don't need* what you're offering them.

When the truths our Father wants His children to live by *aren't* diligently pursued by those who claim to belong to Him, Paul warns they're in danger: "*For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness*" (2 Thessalonians 2:11,12). God has called a people *out of the world's ways and values* to stand firm in His good and righteous ways. His reputation is represented by the *way you live* (2 Thessalonians 1:11,12).

- **If the name of Jesus, which the Hebrew *Yahshua* means "God saves", is able to demolish strongholds and heal toxic memories, how should you respond to someone who refuses to deal with either hindrance?**

Don't let yourself get angry or upset when people refuse the truths that will free them. Rather, *keep praying* for them and wait on our Lord to intervene. Be careful that you're never influenced by their rationalization and trust in the world's ways. Remember the admonition of Jesus: "*Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed*" (John 3:19,20).

## 2. Do you have the courage to ask yourself:

***Would Jesus celebrate Christmas, a holiday of pagan origin?***

The Church at Rome recognized that pagans were more willing to accept Christianity if their heathen customs were accepted as well. So December 25th was chosen as the date to commemorate Jesus' birth because that date was the culmination of the Roman festival for the "rebirth of the sun", the winter solstice. The pagan holiday was marked by decorated trees and wreaths, parties, feasting, and gift-exchanging.



Bible-trusting followers of Jesus, however, found no basis for this sort of celebration in the Word and refused to participate. Rebuffed and affronted, their Roman neighbors publicly maligned these Christians contemptuously. To maintain social stability, "Christmas" was adopted and enforced by religious hierarchy who compromised to make it palatable to pagans. Thus we have the widespread celebration of Christmas even in countries like Japan which cares little for Jesus but loves the idea of gift-giving and Santa!

The irony is that today, if you *don't* celebrate Christmas with parties, trees and gifts, you appear *un-Christian*. We've been accused ourselves. But as we look at the holiday through *His* eyes, we know that esteeming pagan practices to celebrate His birth nullifies the *biblical purpose* for His Incarnation—to die and rise again so that those who trust might live.

(For more on Christmas, see Restoring the Early Church, Chapter 7. *The Roman Conquest of the Church.*)



### 3. Do you have the courage to ask yourself:

***Would Jesus celebrate Easter, a holiday of pagan origin?***

It might seem a little early to address this, but it's important for you to weigh it in your spirit long before the season arrives. Centuries before the Incarnation of Jesus, the Babylonians were enslaved by their worship of the **demonic deity** Ishtar, the goddess of love and war. (This deity was also known as Asherah, Ashtoreth, Eastre, Gaia, and Venus, among other names.) The meaning, however, was the same: "Earth Mother."

The festival of Easter had long been celebrated by the Assyrians, the Phoenicians, the Philistines, and the Babylonians—peoples whom the Hebrews were commanded by their holy God to *not* intermingle with through marriage or adopt any of their detestable practices (see Ezra 9:10-12).

Eastre, the goddess of spring, was annually impregnated by the sun during the spring equinox. To celebrate this festival to their Earth Mother, followers took part in ritual sex acts to initiate fertility. So where did the rabbits and eggs enter in? Again, fertility among these agrarian peoples was paramount. To ensure fertile land, they rolled brightly decorated eggs across their fields. Then, to protect these sacred eggs from "evil spirits", they hid the eggs in rabbit nests. Rabbits are a truly prolific species—we used to raise them!



- **Because of their pagan origin, do think Jesus would celebrate either Christmas or Easter? If He wouldn't, can you celebrate them and not be found sinning against Him?**

(For more on Easter, see our Teaching E-mail 49. *Jesus Christ, Our Passover Lamb.*)

The biblical Feast that we know Jesus will have His people keep in the future is the Feast of Tabernacles (see Zechariah chapter 14 for a detailed discussion of the return of Jesus to Jerusalem as King and the Lord of hosts). During this Feast of rejoicing and thanksgiving, everyone will worship Him, the One Who called the thirsty to keep coming to Him and drink (see John 7:37,38). The Feast of Tabernacles reaffirms that we are sojourners on earth, dependent on our God to provide for all our needs. This world isn't our home; rather, "home" is wherever our Lord Jesus is (2 Corinthians 5:1).

### 4. Do you have the courage to ask yourself:

***Would Jesus belong to a faith community in which there were no apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherd/teachers?***

As His followers, we are urged to *live a life worthy of the calling we've received* (Ephesians 4:1). That takes some guiding and role modeling into spiritual maturity by those Jesus has anointed for that purpose. Our Lord had very specific reasons for making sure that His collective body would be served by those anointed with these gifts of grace (Ephesians 4:7). Each one is to *do their part* according to the grace given them so that the collective body may be built up in love, whether through word or deed:

*It was [Jesus] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be shepherds and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith*

*and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 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 4:11-16).*

Jesus made sure that the equipping work toward service and maturity in Him would be done specifically by apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd/teachers. He knows how great is the need and the example of these giftings for an authentic, interconnected representation of Him as the Head. Developing *unity* in the faith and *equipping* His people for works of service won't take place without these anointings. In fact, Paul emphasizes the roles of apostle and prophet as the foundations on which our Lord extends His Kingdom (see Ephesians 2:19-22).

Keep in mind that we face an aggressive and hateful adversary who schemes and plots to keep us weak and ineffectual (2 Corinthians 2:11). Satan knew that if he could remove the powerful foundations of the apostle and prophet, then he could easily manipulate Christianity into non-biblical religious practices. If there was no input from the apostle or prophet, Satan could replace these anointings with his own people—Nicolaitans, that is, an organized system of clergy to lord their own authority over the “laity” (see Revelation 2:6; 15,16).

**By removing the roles of apostle and prophet, whose compelling motive is to “present every person complete in Christ,” and substituting a system of clergy, Satan has deceived people into placing their loyalty in religious institutions rather than in Jesus as Lord of their lives and the *only* Head of His body.**

Both testaments evidence the role of the *biblical elder* as a proven family leader whose character attests to his competence to lead (1 Timothy 3:2-7). Through Hellenist influence and Roman organizational patterns, the non-biblical positions of hierarchical clergy dominated Christianity by the early 4th century. Achieving these positions of power and influence came through *who you knew* and what sort of *lands or wealth* you could bring into the system. Christ-like character played no part at all in leadership.

Today, titles play a big part in people's evaluation of position. A certain regard is given to those who refer to themselves as “Reverend”, “Father”, or “Pastor”. Some have even sought recognition by calling themselves “Apostle or Prophet” So-and-so, but without the Spirit's anointing and power, the title is empty. People in the pews are easily influenced by “institutional endorsement” and a title. But the selective teaching by those in the pulpit who have no intention of endangering their own position neglects the truth of the power Jesus has given to equip His followers. And that void has left much of Christendom divided and impotent.

If Jesus gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd/teachers, then these anointings still exist because *His Spirit is still with us*. But wherever unbiblical leadership has given way to satanic lies to eliminate or discount these, spiritual lifelessness results.

- **If Jesus would not be part of a faith community that nullifies what He established for His body, can you be part of it and not be found sinning against Him?**

(For more on the role of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and biblical shepherd/teacher, see our book *Pastoring By Elders*; Hebraic Article: *God's Clergy-less Kingdom*; The Way of the Lord, 38. *Theological Hindrances to The LORDship of Jesus (Part 3)*).

For more on Nicolaitans and their devastating influence, see our book *Pastoring By Elders*; our Hebraic Articles: *I Hate Nicolaitanism*; *God's Clergy-less Kingdom*).

##### 5. Do you have the courage to ask yourself:

***Would Jesus belong to a faith community in which He was forced to be a spectator rather than participate in the Spirit?***

The first followers of Jesus joined together as *extended spiritual family* united by His Spirit to love one another and reach others for His Kingdom. All through the week they were aware of Him at work in and through and around them. Therefore, even before they gathered collectively for worship in one another's homes, *each one* was prepared to share something that would build one another up in their communal faith journey as Paul had taught: ***“When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the called-out-ones”*** (1 Corinthians 14:26).

The Spirit of our Lord in their midst knows what is needed to build up His body as a *collective family* being prepared to do the Father's will. So when His followers gather together as brothers and sisters—as people who know each other well

and have frequent contact with one another during the week—their Head, Jesus, has already been at work by His Spirit in them to fully take part in how He wants to move among them communally.

As each one does their part to worship their Lord through song, revelations, testimonies and instruction, the rest are strengthened to press on in obedient trust to do their part to extend His Kingdom throughout the week. As prophetic words from God are proclaimed, the body is strengthened, encouraged and comforted (1 Corinthians 14:3-5).

Because the Spirit is living and active within the lives of Jesus's followers, He purposes to bring glory to Jesus as each one follows His guidance day by day. Therefore, as testimonies of His intervention and work in each life are shared, others are built up as well—the interconnected “body parts” are *all* at work pointing to their Head with grateful hearts!

The Holy Spirit has apportioned to *each* Jesus follower a particular gift that is empowered by Him to bring praise to God (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). That's why Paul makes clear that each one should come prepared to share how the Spirit has used their particular gifting during the week. That way, as they worship Father with psalms and hymns and all sorts of words of wisdom, everyone is edified in Jesus, and God the Father is lifted up.

Ponder in your heart these God-breathed instructions for each communal gathering of Jesus followers:

• ***“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”*** (Ephesians 5:19,20).

- “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you **teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God**” (Colossians 3:16).

- **Jesus would not be part of a fellowship family in which His Spirit is quenched and He’s just a spectator. Can you therefore sit as a passive spectator in your own faith community and think you’re not sinning against Him?**

**6. Do you have the courage to ask yourself:**

***Would Jesus belong to a faith community in which people held onto unconfessed sin?***

Each and every one of us would *stand condemned already* if our Lord Jesus hadn’t sacrificed Himself on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins (John 3:14-18). When we respond to His Spirit’s conviction to *repent*—to *turn away* from our sin and *turn to* our Father through the death of Jesus on our behalf—we enter into an intimate relationship with Father God (Acts 5:31,32).

When people sin, they sever fellowship with our Lord and our heavenly Father: “If we **claim** to have fellowship with Him while we are **walking in the darkness, we are lying and not living out the truth**” (1 John 1:6, CJB). But our Father is loving as well as absolutely holy. We are able to access forgiveness and cleansing when we *take ownership* of our sins without blame or excuse and *confess* each one before Him: “If we **confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness**” (1 John 1:9).

Each person who is indwelt by the Spirit because of their trust in Jesus is

part of the collective body of Christ worldwide, all those who are the called-out. We come to Him individually, but from then on we are a part that’s joined together with the whole. This collective entity mirrors ancient Israel as God’s chosen people. It was their *communal identity*, and there was a communal consequence when those who sinned refused to repent: the Father held the *entire community accountable*. That’s evident from these examples, warnings from which Paul says we as Christ’s body are to learn (1 Corinthians 10:6,10):

- God prevented the entire nation of Israel from conquering the city of Ai because of the hidden sin of one man, Achan (see Joshua 7).
- In disobedience David numbered his troops, and thousands died of plague (1 Chronicles 21).
- Korah’s rebellion resulted in the death of his entire family (Numbers 16) as well as the families of the other instigators.
- God gave all of Judah up to captivity because King Manasseh led them astray into evil and idolatry (2 Kings 23:26,27).

A *collective responsibility* distinguishes those God has called out of the world system to fulfill His purpose and plans. That responsibility is to deal with sin among those who have violated His reputation through their *refusal to repent* of their sin. This theme of communal responsibility pervades our Lord’s command for confronting a brother who sins (see Matthew 18:15-17).

Tolerating unrepentance will tempt others to sin as well (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). In the pattern of God’s commands to Israel, the unrepentant person was ejected from the community’s midst (Numbers 15:30,31). The same collective res-



possibility to expel the wicked person *until he repents* marks Paul's command for faith families today (see 1 Corinthians 5:2,12,13). When he repents, then he's to be welcomed back into the fellowship family (2 Corinthians 2:5-8).

- **If Jesus would not fellowship with the unrepentant who calls himself a Christian, can you be part of a faith community that does, and not be found sinning against Him?**

(For more on the importance of communal righteousness, see Teaching E-mail 31. *Shepherding A Fellowship Family*; The Way of the Lord, 19. *Your Relationship With Your Lord Jesus (Part 4)*; Discussing How to Restore the Early Church, Lesson 45. *Upholding Communal Righteousness*).

***“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you”*** (Isaiah 60:1).

We want to close this Teaching E-mail with some recommendations for you to help you free yourself and your family from spiritual darkness and from tolerating religious practices Jesus wouldn't be part of. The secret is found in this group process:

- **Forming** • **Storming**
- **Norming** • **Performing**

This sequence reflects a process that those close to you in the faith can mutually incorporate in order to press on into all the truths Jesus has called you to walk in through loving, obedient trust as His witnesses.

**Forming** represents the period during which people *establish a meaningful relationship*. It may be a marriage, making a new friend, starting a new job, or forming a new faith community.

**Storming** is the time needed for rela-

tionships to *form a cohesive purpose*. Through asking questions and turning to the Bible as your framework for standards, you can collectively establish biblical goals and values. It's a time of developing respect for each other as you determine a mutual Christ-like purpose for this relationship.

Disagreements and some heightened tension can come about during the storming period as you all work through exposing spiritual darkneses or unbiblical faith practices. What gets followers of Jesus through this period is their desire and intent to become more like Him and to do Father's will.

**Norming** and **Performing** occur when the significant hindrances in the relationships have been removed and a shared motive to become more like Jesus permeates the relationships. Unlike the storming period of discussion, when you are norming and performing, your efforts and energies are focused on *actually carrying out* Father's purposes and helping one another grow in the character of Christ.

All throughout the storming, norming and performing seasons you find yourselves developing a deep regard for and understanding cooperation among the various spiritual gifts functioning within your group. Each person can recognize how indispensable each spiritual gift is and appreciate why our Lord brought the relationships together in the first place.

As you all find the interconnected joy of performing, you come to a deeper understanding of the beauty of serving our Lord as His precious slave and friend. The mutual fulfillment of doing His will with others who love Him wholeheartedly is the greatest synergy a human can experience!