

August 14, 2010

Do You Speak *Christianese* Without Christ?

As you've noticed in the **Kingdom Living Today** narratives, ***The conversations among Kingdom-minded people reflect a dynamic relationship with our Lord Jesus and a deep desire to do His will—no matter what the cost.*** This is our earnest hope for each of you. In this light, we want to discuss something that may be hindering your daily pursuit of a Kingdom responsiveness of love-motivated obedient trust, especially if you've had an extensive "churched" background.

Having worked among so many church groups and denominations over the last 33 years, we've come to recognize the "Christianese" that churched people get accustomed to in their conversations. That is, they develop their own religious vocabulary that enables them to identify with each other because they speak the same "spiritual lingo." Some religious groups are more insistent than others in instilling among their members a "Christian" vocabulary that represents their particular creedal bent.

This practice may not sound harmful, but consider this: Christianese can be used by a person or a group of people to *ward off* any determination to obey God's commands. While they can really "talk the talk", their lives are often beset by relational shallowness and hidden attitudinal sin. That's because they don't want their inner darkness to be exposed — especially their rebellious heart against fully obeying Lord Jesus in fulfilling their part in Kingdom service no matter what the cost.

The more devoted a person or religious group is to their creedal allegiance and practices than they are to a love-motivated obedience to Jesus, the more Christianese they use.

On the other hand:

The more determined a person or group is to keep deepening an intimate relationship with the indwelling Spirit of Christ and to do His will, the less religious lingo they use. Their discussion reflects a personal intimacy with Jesus that's revealed by both a yearning to become more like Him and a desire to please Him. These people "WALK the talk."

Many years ago, an older wise seminary professor, Dr. Roger Nicole, shared an important lesson with me (Mike) as we talked over a cup of coffee:

"One of the problems you'll face when you leave here is resolving issues between Christians over controversy about Bible truths. Most Christians think that 'faith in God' includes 'faith in their religious practices.' But by mixing the two, they attach the emotional commitment they should have to their trust in God to a resistance to change any of their faith practices. It's this *resistance to change* that turns practices into denominational traditions."

In subsequent years of counseling religious leaders and working among various religious groups at our retreat center, we found his words to be all too true. When we returned from our research in Israel in 1994, there were an estimated 24,000 competing religious sects and denominations within Christendom. Now there are over 38,000.

One of the hindrances that keeps millions from being devoted more to Jesus than to their particular religious practices is the seminary training received by their leaders. The practices and techniques taught at seminaries strongly impact congregations and parachurch organizations. Therefore, what is carried out from the pulpit on down is a loyalty to denominational practices and rituals that far supersedes devotion to our Lord Jesus and His revealed will (*rhema*) that the Bible repeatedly calls for.

How can you recognize if this has happened within your own spiritual circle? When you ask people the *source* of their particular practices, the pathway *doesn't lead to Jesus* as the Head of His called-out ones. Instead, they refer to **some accepted observance or tradition that people before them in that denomination have established and perpetuated.**

In **Discussing How To Restore The Early Church**, Lesson 20. *The Impact of Hellenist Seminaries*, we recount some of Mike's experiences at seminary from 1978-82. Here's an excerpt:

"One morning, my professor, Dr. Charles Schauffele, asked, 'Would you do a project analyzing the fruit of this seminary? I've been here over thirty years, and I don't know if I've wasted my time.' I accepted his request. Through the use of surveys and interviews I studied the nearby congregations to which some of the seminary's clergy graduates had gone to minister. When Dr. Schauffele read the results of the research, that elderly gentleman sat in front of me and wept. *Not one* of the graduates I'd surveyed had demonstrated a God-vision for what He desired for each congregation. Instead, these men perceived their pastoral position from the vantage point of religious practices and perspectives they'd been taught at seminary:

- Dutifully carrying out the tasks the seminary had inculcated in them;
- Appraising themselves as the most valued person in the congregation and focusing their efforts on maintaining their central position of control over their faith community;
- Over-esteeming the value of their rhetorical preaching and the vast amount of time devoted to weekly sermon preparation;
- Nagging themselves about their financial security and continually seeking ways to ensure greater income;
- Making sure nothing unpleasant or challenging 'rocked the boat' of their congregational headship."

Seminaries instruct prospective pastors in how to keep an organization running well. In other words, it's easy for ambitious, inexperienced young people to go to seminaries and learn techniques that will keep a religious system functioning smoothly. When they graduate and get to their place of ministry, they recruit warm bodies who will employ the methods their seminaries taught them. Sadly, the entire arrangement is independent of

our Lord Jesus for guidance or empowerment.

On the other hand:

Jesus lived side by side with Twelve for over three years and role-modeled how to put into practice our Father's will. It's more demanding, and takes far longer, to learn to love and trust a Sovereign God Who makes sure our life experience involves total dependence and reliance on His faithfulness. As with Jesus' method of making disciples: *it requires personal relationship and intentional load-bearing to reproduce the same lifestyle*. This is why the shepherds of the earliest followers of Jesus were older, wiser men who had been prepared through life experience to authentically represent Father's compassion for His children.

"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life" (John 5:40).

Jesus criticized religious leaders of His day because they failed to realize that the Scriptures, the Hebrew passages they so ardently pursued, point to a dynamic personal relationship with Him. When you're devoted to someone in an intimate relationship, your language reflects that personal involvement and interaction. This principle is the same regarding your intimate interaction with the Spirit of Christ within you: *Your language — what you say and how you say it — will reflect a living and loving relationship with our Lord. And out of that devotion, your life will reflect action that's prompted by His Spirit befitting your service to Him in His Kingdom.*

The religious leaders whom Jesus criticized in John 5:40, above, relied on their Scriptural knowledge and interpretation of it but *not* on a trust-driven relationship with God. We've noted in Lifebyte 69. *What God's People Must Do To Regain Spiritual Power* and in other writings that a personal need to be "born again" had been taught by the Hebraic stream of rabbis over 200 years before the coming of Jesus. Being *born again* was a shift from following the letter of the Law to living in a love-based, obedient-trust relationship with God in the pattern of our forefather Abraham. When you were "born from above," you underwent a major change in your spiritual life: from religious practice (or no practice) to full trust and reliance on the Lord of Heaven.

The religious leaders of Jesus's day were well aware of this truth. Yet they refused to be born again through recognizing that Torah and the Prophets were being fulfilled in the Person of Messiah Jesus. Let this resistance not be so with you. Take a careful look at your own life and at those with whom you have close fellowship. Discuss the following questions with them, purposing to make the changes that will please our Father:

- Do your words and conversations reflect an active, responsive relationship with our Lord Jesus and a deep desire to please our Father?

- Or, are your conversations filled with religious phraseology you've been taught but evidence nothing that would point to a dynamic and authentic relationship with Him?
- Are you quick to spout religious lingo to nonbelievers whether you know them well or not? Do they, in fact, cringe when you bandy these phrases about, realizing that inside you really don't care about them as *people*?

"If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Romans 14:8).

You may be aware that most of the commands given in the Newer Testament are in the plural sense of "you all", intended for several people to keep collectively rather than just one person. Collective obedience requires cooperation, not only to put our Lord's commands into practice but also to help each other in our sanctification into His likeness. Below is a diagram that depicts the role of Christ-followers as encouragers, correcters, and rebukers in the lives of those with whom we have close fellowship as brothers and sisters in His Spirit. The consequences when we *don't* help each other this way along the journey are grave, even perhaps crossing the line into eternal damnation.

May you be an instrument our Lord uses to help others be true to Him in the encroaching darkness.

Mike & Sue

P.S. We recently received a short note from Tom White of Voice of the Martyrs. We thought his words of encouragement might bless you:

"God delights in using his people to create something beautiful "out of nothing." We Christians don't win or lose in society. We stay close to what God is doing and become part of it, even if we look like failures. I encourage you in your own Christian walk. It doesn't matter if our efforts never look glorious. Eternity reveals what is fool's gold and what is real."