

August 5, 2010

How Many Have You Won To Christ?

If you're on the mailing list of *The Voice of the Martyrs* monthly magazine, then you probably took note of the above question in the August 2010 issue. This is what the Egyptian woman, Noora, asked of the man who had proposed to her. Noora had suffered severely for her faith and had learned to love and serve Jesus all the more. She didn't want to marry a man who wasn't equally dedicated to being used by our Lord as His witness!

It's been our observation over the years that the more devoted a person is to Jesus as Lord of their life, the more attentive they are about the commitment to Him in others before they extend biblical fellowship as an authentic brother or sister. Conversely, the more a person finds comfort and self-satisfaction in their own religious complacency, the less concerned they are about the spiritual state of others.

Upholding criteria for extending *genuine fellowship* (NOT today's spiritually meaningless social activities) is very biblical. In fact, examining the spiritual state of other people is strongly encouraged (see Acts 20:28). The most important reason for this is to uphold communal righteousness so that the Name of Jesus not be brought down in your midst by giving way to sin's deceit. (See Psalms 32:2; 1Peter 1:13-16.) There's a second motive for confirming that those who wish to fellowship as biblical faith family with you are purposing to live uprightly: to keep out the spiritual wolves whose hearts are of this world. Their compromise with Truth and their desire to live according to worldly standards may entice you away from wholehearted devotion to Jesus and loving, obedient trust (see Acts 20:29-31).

Early on in his ministry, the Apostle Paul had his faith and doctrine tested by recognized elders to make sure that the message he'd be sharing aligned with scriptural truth. Only then was he received as an emissary to non-Jews:

"James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews" (Galatians 2:9).

- Would James, Peter and John extend the right hand of fellowship to you — their meaningful endorsement that you are indeed indwelt by the Spirit of Christ and living by His Word?
- What criteria do you use to extend biblical fellowship to others?
- Do you know what the biblical definition of fellowship is according to how the writers (and therefore our Father) intended it to be understood?

Our fellowship with others originates with our fellowship with our Father and His Son, Jesus through His Spirit in us. This fellowship is grounded on the biblical parameter that we are free from unconfessed sin — thus purified from all unrighteousness (see 1 John

1:3,9). *Our fellowship with others in Christ who are living in repentance out of love for Him is the foundation for the relational connectedness the first followers of Jesus embraced — communal righteousness.*

Western culture, including much of westernized Christendom, is dominated by "political correctness" (the doctrines and standards embraced by the powermongers and people of influence). Therefore, many followers of Jesus who are called by His Word to confirm the spiritual condition of others balk, fearing to ask the appropriate questions. We're surrounded by such a demand for "tolerance" (except, of course, when it comes to the Gospel of Christ!) that any testing or verification of one's relationship with Christ is decreed narrow-minded or even cultish. That's why any call for communal righteousness by those who have sought to apply the Hebraic foundations of loving, obedient trust has been generally denounced as "legalistic". Perhaps the response the Spirit has given us will encourage you as well: *We're seeing our prayers answered and our heavenly Father receiving testimonies of praise through this. So why would we forfeit His delight in answering us by entertaining the unrepentant in our midst?*

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you —unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Paul penned the above command in a plural sense as a call to those within a collective faith community to test themselves for spiritual authenticity. The first line of testing, however, is the *individual*, who through self-examination needs to discern if the Holy Spirit is convicting him or her of any sin. Through confessing any revealed sin, repenting of it and receiving the cleansing forgiveness of our Father, we are then free to renew our covenant in Christ through communion:

"A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment" (1 Corinthians 11:28-31).

How many thousands of Christians bring judgment on themselves by participating in communion with unconfessed sin? Do you think our Father sits back idly while an unrepentant people who profane the precious body and blood of Jesus?

In *Discussing How To Restore The Early Church*, Lesson 45 (a free download at our website) we recount this anecdote:

"While at the retreat center Mike was approached by the elders of a particular congregation because so many of the women were miscarrying. He questioned these men about the level of tolerated sin within the congregation and the defilement of their communion gathering through unrepentant sin. The leaders prayed about this and confronted the congregation. The Spirit brought them to repentance, and out of love for Christ they stayed repentant. The miscarriages ceased and many new babies were

welcomed into their midst!"

We encourage you: Don't be reluctant to scrutinize your own spiritual condition, and to love Jesus enough to discern the spiritual condition of everyone in your fellowship for His Name's sake.

Mike & Sue