

Christian Halakhahs

*Loving Jesus Through
The Way You Apply His Word*



by Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz

Restoration Ministries International



[For an audio version of Christian Halakhahs](#)

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2019

Christian Halakhahs was first published as a hard-copy book in 1998. Our goal was to help readers become aware of the vast differences between the relational intimacy and spiritual power of the earliest followers of Jesus, and the self-obsessed, lukewarm compromise with the world which represents so much of Christendom today.

Since that time we've expanded the contents of this book through deeper insights and materials to equip people to restore the way of life our forefathers in the faith experienced in their love-grounded, obedient trust. Please use the links to these various materials alongside this book so that the Holy Spirit may enable you to live a life that pleases your heavenly Father and lifts up the name of Jesus to a desperately needy world.

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Restoration Ministries International

- Restoring the Hebraic** Foundations of the Earliest Followers of Jesus
- Preparing Today's Followers of Jesus to Do Their Part in His Kingdom

**Following Jesus as LORD of your life with the trust-based determination of the first Hebrew, Abraham.

About Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz



Mike and Sue Dowgiewicz became followers of our Lord Jesus in 1977 while Mike was a career officer in the navy, having served three deployments during the Vietnam Conflict as a helicopter pilot. After being born again he realized that following Jesus was a response of overwhelming love toward his Lord, and he wanted to learn how he could more adequately present the life-changing work of His Savior to others. Resigning from the navy in 1978, he attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to study the roots of the many various denominations and sects throughout Christendom. There he was made painfully aware of both the division and the competition among the segmented religious establishment. Through his own ministry track, however, he learned how important interpersonal connection with one another is in discipling others to walk in Jesus' steps through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Sue attended seminary as well, focusing on studies in Newer Testament Greek and on effective ways to reach others from different cultures. In a way that only our Father could work out, both of these pursuits would feature heavily in their various ministries over the course of their lives together.

After seminary Mike and Sue administrated and taught at a Christian retreat center where they interacted with over 5,000 people. They were able to come alongside those who were hurting relationally within their families and experiencing frustration in their own faith walk. While at the center, Mike was a counselor to religious leaders throughout southern New England. He was able to use the skills he'd acquired from his graduate studies in interpersonal relationships to encourage these leaders to develop a unified concern among their congregations for the lost in their communities to encounter Jesus.

Sue found her heart's desire to work among people of other cultures by teaching conversational English to international students at a nearby university for six years. Through their time together these students became dear friends, and a number of them heard about Jesus for the first time. Mike and Sue's combined ministry was recognized by the Associated Press in an article that was published nationally. Mike also was featured in an article in New England Church Life, "Who Pastors the Pastor?"

Following their retreat ministry they lived in Israel, where our Father revealed the Hebraic foundations to them. Restoration Ministries International has its basis in research and revelation they did while living in Israel, and Mike and Sue are sharing our Father's re-establishment of the Hebraic foundations that both communally strengthened the early followers of our Lord Jesus and spiritually empowered them. Their present ministry through the internet is reaching people from 105 countries with a call to a life of loving and obedient trust in Jesus as their Lord.

Mike holds a B.A. in Economics from the University of Connecticut, an MBA from California Lutheran College, and a Master of Religious Education from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Sue holds a B.S. in Education from the University of Connecticut as well as having taken several graduate courses at GCTS.

Father's Purpose For Restoration Ministries International

Restoration Ministries has its basis in revelation and research they did while living in Israel. For the past 24 years through Restoration Ministries International Mike and Sue have been sharing our Father's re-establishment of the relational priorities that strengthened the early followers of Christ to boldly reach and disciple others. The core of the Hebraic Foundations is based upon prioritizing relationships, beginning from the center of the diagram below outward. Restoration Ministries International was given by our Heavenly Father the responsibility to focus on the center three priorities.



- [For further information on our Father and Jesus.](#)
- [For further information on Your Home.](#)
- [For further information on Fellowship In Homes.](#)

Each of the materials produced by Restoration Ministries International is interconnected with a family of information related to what our Father told us to call "The Hebraic Restoration". Each item is designed to stand alone to equip you to apply these foundational truths and principles to your life. Yet the real strength of each is found in its interrelationship to the other facets of the Hebraic Restoration.

Through these truths our Father is revealing the trust-based, obedient lifestyle of our father Abraham:

“The promise comes by trust, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Romans 4:16,17; see also Galatians 3:29).

Followers of our Lord Jesus are children of Abraham, the first Hebrew (Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:7). Abraham trusted God in love-grounded obedience, willing even to sacrifice his son at God’s command. Therefore, God called him

into covenant union with Himself, and caused Abraham to be the father/role model for all followers of Jesus our Lord.

THAT MEANS YOU!

Chapter 1

Halakhah: The Way We Apply God's Word



- John and Kim were engaged to be married in two months. As they sat in front of the fireplace one evening, John asked, “What are we going to do about birth control?”
- Rob and Amy had been married for six years and had two children, ages four and three. The young couple had become followers of Jesus shortly after their second child was born. After Amy put the children to bed she asked, “Rob, what do think God wants us to do about educating our kids?”
- Tom was a successful realtor in a large, midwestern city. This particular afternoon he was having lunch with one of the elders of his congregation. Tom commented, “I wanted us to get together because I have a problem. I’ve been approached by a company that wants to buy a piece of property I’m handling for a client. The buyers want to put up a pornographic shop on the property and I feel uneasy about it.”

This list of situations could go on endlessly. These are just a few examples of common occurrences facing God’s children each and every day. Commonplace questions and issues such as these were the normal basis for teaching in the early Church — *practical application of the Word of God to daily life*.

As Hellenist (Greek) philosophers and those indoctrinated with a Hellenistic world-view converted to Christianity in the second and third centuries, the approach and purpose for biblical instruction were altered. The *Hebraic pattern of interactive discussion that led to life change* was set aside for the *Greek concept of teaching: conveyance of content to argue about*.

The Hebraic approach to problems *drew out biblical responses* from the learners. In contrast, the Greek instructor was responsible to lecture his students and entertain philosophical arguments regarding the material he presented. Note the emphasis shift from Hebraic *life application* to Greek *knowledge accumulation*.

The Restoration is ushering in a return to the life application pattern of the Hebraic early Church known as *halakhah* (hah'-luh-kuh).

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6).

Life is full of options. Some lead to life and some to destruction. The pattern of choices each of us makes will determine which way our lives will go.

Jesus called Himself “the way.” In the Book of Acts the early Christians were known as “the Way”:

*“However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a **follower of the Way**, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14, emphasis added).*

This use of the term “the way” has a very distinct Hebraic importance known as *halakhah*. The root word, *halak*, means “to walk.” Thus, *halakhah* refers to walking out your life in a way that coincides with God’s Word.

For the Jew, *halakhah* was the way Mosaic law was interpreted and applied to a particular situation. *Halakhah* represented the best efforts of the community elders to discover and apply one of several true, biblical options to a given situation. In other words, the precedents that had been established from previous cases or issues were examined. Those that best suited the present situation were explored. The halakhic application of biblical truth that seemed most appropriate was then offered as a course of action.

The individual who had first presented the issue for discussion understood that biblical demands had been satisfied by the decision that had been reached. A *halakhah* for the resolution of that particular issue was then written down as a

guide for the whole community. The emphasis in all of this investigation was not on interpretation of Scripture alone but on correct application of the truth.

A biblical example: In the Book of Ruth, Boaz approached the elders of the city concerning the property of Naomi and Ruth. The Mosaic law stipulated, *“If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband’s brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel”* (Deuteronomy 25:5,6). Boaz had been approached by Ruth to exercise this privilege, called the right of the kinsman-redeemer. He was aware, however, of a relative closer than he who could fulfill that role.



Despite his desire to marry Ruth, Boaz approached the potential redeemer and brought him to the elders. When the kinsman refused his responsibility, the elders applied the law of Deuteronomy to Boaz and he married Ruth. Through this marriage, he and his descendants would thus be entitled to Naomi and Ruth’s land.

This decision on the part of the elders would have been recorded as a *halakhah*. It represented the way the law that had been established in Deuteronomy had been applied to that type of situation.

Chapter 2

Halakhahs Reveal That You Walk the Talk



The Older Testament prophets often spoke in broad terms that required more precise detail for specific life application. Amos intoned, “*Let justice roll like a river*” (5:24). *Halakhah* translated this call for justice into something do-able: mercy that met the needs of the poor; visitation of those in prison; charity that expressed true faith in God. (Note the specific application of “true religion” in James 1:27, looking after widows and orphans in their distress, and 2:14-17, helping a brother in need.)

Many Christians today have established *halakhahs* of which they are not even aware. Consider the scenarios presented in the opening paragraphs. You are married and have prayerfully established with your spouse a biblical understanding of your practice concerning birth control. Or you have made your decision before God to educate your children in a public school, Christian school, or home school. In either case, you have, in fact, established a *halakhah* for your family. You have explored the Word of God and sought the understanding of the Holy Spirit, the *rhema*, which is God’s specific will for you in the application of Scripture to your household.

For a more complete understanding of the critical importance of rhema, see [Lifebyte 53 Kingdom Living \(Part 3\) Born Again—Guided By The Spirit Of Jesus.](#)

Halakhah requires you to *apply biblical truths to all realms of your life*, whether to education, finances, ethical decisions, or religious practices. Just as you should “*always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have*” (1 Peter 3:15), so, too, should you be prepared to share how you have reached decisions and made choices from biblical principles you have explored. You are not telling others how *they* should live. You are simply demonstrating that you have based *your* decisions on biblically sound footing.

Halakhah was not intended to be a mere code of rules to delineate behavior for each life situation you encounter. The aim of *halakhah* was an expression of yearning for a dynamic love relationship with God: “*The Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love*” (Psalm 147:11). The Hebrew people recognized this relational aspect. God was far from being an unapproachable deity. A major purpose of *halakhah* bound a believer to God through love that was seen in his or her obedience:

“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22).

The very nature of God’s goodness and holiness was intended to inspire obedience. It was also His authoritative right to demand it. The balance of God’s power, justice, and righteousness on one hand, with His long-suffering, kindness, and mercy on the other, was seen in His Incarnation as Jesus the Messiah. A follower of Jesus wanted to apply the Bible to every area of his life as a visible sign of his love relationship with his Lord.

“Do not go beyond what is written.’ Then you will not take pride in one man over against another” (1 Corinthians 4:6).

In our books *Restoring the Early Church* and *Pastoring By Elders*, we discussed the difference between revisionism and apperception. ***Revisionism*** occurs when we try to *restate the past* based on ever-evolving cultural standards. Many school textbooks are now being written to appease particular political or social agendas. For example, most references to the Christian heritage and faith of our founding fathers have been revised to eliminate religious motivation. Many current texts

now reflect instead our forefathers' burning desire for greater economic prosperity in the New World.

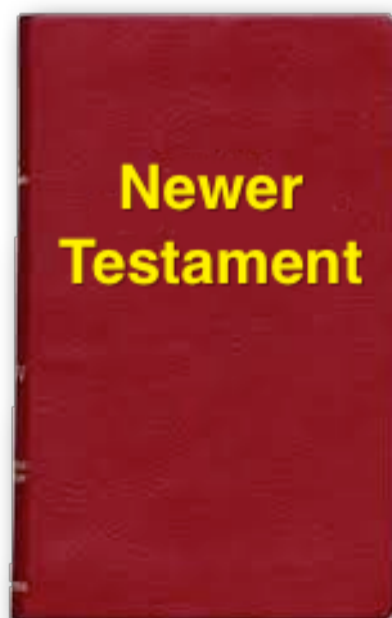
For further insight into the difference between apperceiving and revisionism, see Pastoring By Elders, [Chapter 3 “Undoing The Effect Of Rule Number 3”](#)

One revised version of the Bible offers a genderless God to accommodate the feminist movement. Jesus stresses that lies are Satan's native tongue:

“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

Deception is a poisonous but powerful weapon in Satan's arsenal. The deceiver has been at work since the Garden of Eden and it is no surprise that his work continues unabated.

Revisionism within the Church has had a profound effect throughout the centuries. Anti-Semitism began to infect the early Church by the second century. The Hebraic heritage upon which Jesus founded His Church was discarded in favor of Hellenist philosophical interpretation and a Roman organizational system that relegated power and control to an educated few. The power of the Holy Spirit to breathe life into the Scripture as a guide for daily life was disregarded. Subsequent generations of believers were handed something far different than what was intended by the Lord.



“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).

The opposite of revisionism is *apperception*, interpreting new information in terms of *earlier established truth*. In other words, whenever you encounter a newer teaching or practice, you evaluate it in light of older, proven truths.

Jesus relied on apperception in His teachings by *quoting the Hebrew Scriptures*, or Older Testament, and then *applying that truth to the situation* He was addressing. So important were the Hebrew Scriptures as a basis for the gospel message that they were quoted, or *apperceived*, fifty-one times in the book of Matthew alone!

Paul commended the Bereans for examining the Scriptures as he taught. Through discussion they were able to *apperceive* Paul’s new teachings in light of Hebraic scriptural truths (see Acts 17:11). By evaluating his teachings based on what they already knew to be true in the Scriptures, the Bereans could then apply Paul’s teaching to their lives.

The principle is the same today: Appropriate the nobleness of the Bereans by examining *both testaments* to discover and apply God’s revealed will as *halakhahs* in your own life.

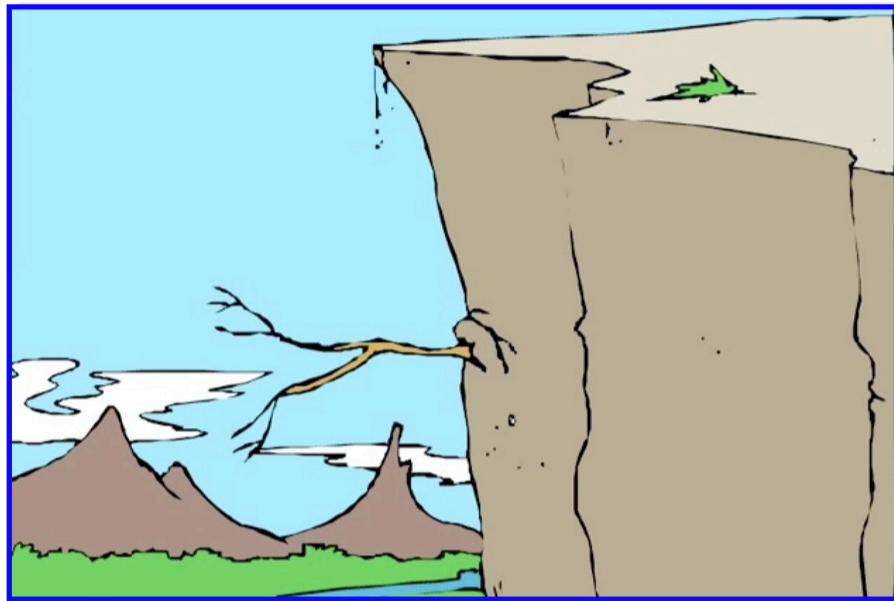
The halakhic process values the clear teaching of the Bible as authoritative. Apperception lets the Bible speak for itself with the plain sense of a scripture’s meaning, discerning what would have been clearly understood by the writer or by his readers. *Halakhah* deals with the decisions and responsibilities you encounter in your concrete daily existence, for the Bible was given to reveal God and His will for a life that pleases Him.

Chapter 3

Will You Build A Fence or Get An Ambulance?

Consider the merits of the following poem. As you build up your own “fence” of scriptural application, your decisions will be far less susceptible to ungodly, worldly intrusion. Many of the problems faced by believers today are a result of not establishing *halakhahs* by apperceiving the truths of the Bible.

THE CLIFF



‘Twas a dangerous cliff, as they freely confessed,
Though to walk near its crest was so pleasant;
But over its terrible edge there had slipped
A duke and full many a peasant.
The people said something would have to be done,
But their projects did not at all tally.
Some said, “Put a fence ‘round the edge of the cliff,”
Some, “An ambulance down in the valley.”

The lament of the crowd was profound and was loud,
As their hearts overflowed with their pity;
But the cry for the ambulance carried the day
As it spread through the neighboring city.
A collection was made to accumulate aid,
And the dwellers in highway and alley
Gave dollars or cents—not to furnish a fence—
But an ambulance down in the valley.

“For the cliff is all right if you’re careful,” they said;
“And if folks ever slip and are dropping,
It isn’t the slipping that hurts them so much
As the shock down below—when they’re stopping.”
So for years (we have heard), as these mishaps occurred
Quick forth would the rescuers sally,
To pick up the victims who fell from the cliff
With the ambulance down in the valley.

Said one, to his plea, “It’s a marvel to me
That you’d give so much greater attention
To repairing results than to curing the cause;
You had much better aim at prevention.
For the mischief, of course, should be stopped at its source,
Come, neighbors and friends, let us rally.
It is far better sense to rely on a fence
Than an ambulance down in the valley.”

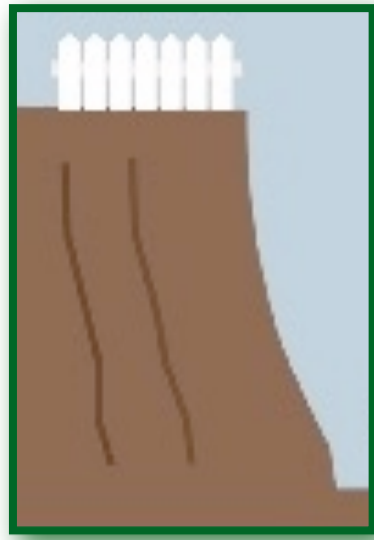
“He is wrong in his head,” the majority said;
“He would end all our earnest endeavor,
He’s a man who would shirk this responsible work,
But we will support it forever.
Aren’t we picking up all just as fast as they fall
And giving them care liberally?
A superfluous fence is of no consequence,
If the ambulance works in the valley.”

The story looks queer as we’ve written it here,
But things oft occur that are stranger.
More humane, we assert, than to succor the hurt,
Is the plan of removing the danger.
The best possible course is to safeguard the source,
Attend to things rationally.
Yes, build up the fence, and let us dispense
With the ambulance down in the valley.

(Author Unknown)

The ambulance caters to the *perceived* problem rather than addressing the real danger: *straying from the righteous way of life Father requires of His children.*

Halakhah is the safety fence at the top of the cliff, providing clear and direct understanding.



Revisionism is the ambulance at the bottom, manipulating Scripture to suit your own purposes.



Ask yourself in each circumstance or decision you face: “*What does God want me to do in this situation?*” Two possible options—the ambulance or the fence—are open to followers of Jesus. One puts the ambulance down in the valley while you pursue personal mistakes of the past and try to discover who to blame. This path leads to indecision and confusion.

You may also find yourself in the ambulance if you study the Bible to acquire knowledge *about* God and His ways but apply little of its truth to your life. The Word then becomes a historical textbook rather than a source of truth to be lived out through the power of the Spirit.

Jesus criticized the Pharisees and the teachers of the law for failing to understand and apply the Torah in the way that God desired. They regarded the Scriptures as an end in themselves: “*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that **by them** you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me*” (John 5:39).

Knowledge of the Scriptures *without* the application that conforms to God’s will can lead to prideful self-inflation: “*Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up*” (1 Corinthians 8:1). You don’t need God’s grace to *know* the Word. You do need His grace to *live it out*.

Jesus also criticized the Pharisees and teachers of the law for misapplying the Torah (Older Testament):

*He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; **their teachings are but rules taught by men.**’ You have **let go of the commands of God** and are holding on to the traditions of men.”*

*And He said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For **Moses said**, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ **But you say** that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus **you nullify the word of God by your tradition** that you have handed down. And you do many things like that’” (Mark 7:6-13).*

These warnings to the Pharisees and teachers of the law are pertinent to us today. Is your reliance on scripture leading you to a life that’s more directly conformed to that of the Master? Ask yourself, Am I so focused on obedience to the *letter* of the Word that I am missing the *grace-filled spirit* of it? Perhaps this illustration will help.



A man in our home fellowship was concerned about the financial plight of his mother. She had lost a large sum of money in poor investments and needed help. He didn't have extra resources himself but had continued to tithe to the congregation. When we suggested that he send his tithe to his mother, he objected, "Doesn't the Bible say I have to tithe to the church?" As we all delved together into the Word, sharing insights and asking questions, he was able to come up with a *personal halakhah*: He would use his tithe to help his mom.

This was not a command for the rest of us, but a *rhema* for him as these verses spoke to his heart:

"But you [Pharisees] say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father or his mother' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition" (Matthew 15:5,6).

He knew that God was speaking to him to "honor his mother" in a most needful and tangible way.

Chapter 4

How the Halakhic Process Works

What caused the Church to lose its apperception and application of biblical truths? The men we call “Church Fathers” introduced Hellenism into Christianity. Famous Hellenists include: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa), Peter of Sebaste, Maximus the Confessor, and John of Damascus. Many of these men were anti-Semitic and wrote virulently against the Jewish people.



And, as the Hebraic roots of Christianity were discarded by *ever-increasing anti-Semitism* in the early second century, the Hebraic processes of applying biblical truth to daily life disappeared. The prevalent Hellenist philosophy “elevated” spiritual life to encompass pietism and ritual that were considered ideal and unattainable by common “lay” people. Only men who were separated out from the populace by virtue of education or asceticism (such as priests and monks) could define and model “holy” and “righteous” living. Establishing personal responsibility for a biblical lifestyle was effectively removed from the average follower of Christ.

In the second century a businessman named Marcion tried to persuade believers that the Older Testament was inferior to the Newer Testament. He insisted that the Hebrew Scriptures be dismissed as *unauthoritative*. Even though Marcion was eventually excommunicated, his teachings spread; in fact, they continue to influence the church today.



Whenever you think (or are taught) that the Hebrew Bible is a secondary or even irrelevant reference source for your practice of faith and conduct, you are under the influence of Marcion's teaching. Paul and the other Newer Testament writers understood the importance of the Hebrew Bible:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16,17; emphasis added).

At the time of the Newer Testament writers, the only Scripture available was the Hebrew Bible! The truths that equipped them for righteousness were the Hebrew texts of their forefathers.

Coinciding with Marcion's influence, the Hellenist philosophers who had converted to Christianity allegorized much of the Older Testament. Rather than recognizing the Hebrew Bible passages as a historical narrative and the standard for right relationship with God, the converted philosophers altered their meaning to “sanitize” the earthly reality that the Bible indeed represented.

The Hellenist influence separated “corrupt” physical existence from the higher spiritual plane by allegorizing the text, making it suggest a deeper, more pietistic meaning than was obvious. The Bible was reinterpreted away from practical application and elevated to a higher sphere of meditation. The reason for one's life choices became whatever the priest dictated.

Today, and for the past 1700+ years, *ecclesiastical domination* has turned these family gatherings into a one-person show in which a hired clergy person “preaches” while the rest listen with their mouths closed.

Chapter 5

Dialoguing vs Preaching: Who's Talking?

The writings of the Newer Testament represent, in a sense, the initial *halakhahs* of the early Church. Much of the Newer Testament is based on the rich teachings and revelation of the Hebrew Bible, and expands upon what was already understood by the early Jewish believers.

Thus, when Jesus delivers his “sermon on the mount” in Matthew 5-7, He is applying truths in which His listeners have been steeped. He is refocusing the external obedience that has been taught by many of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees into an *inner heart transformation*.

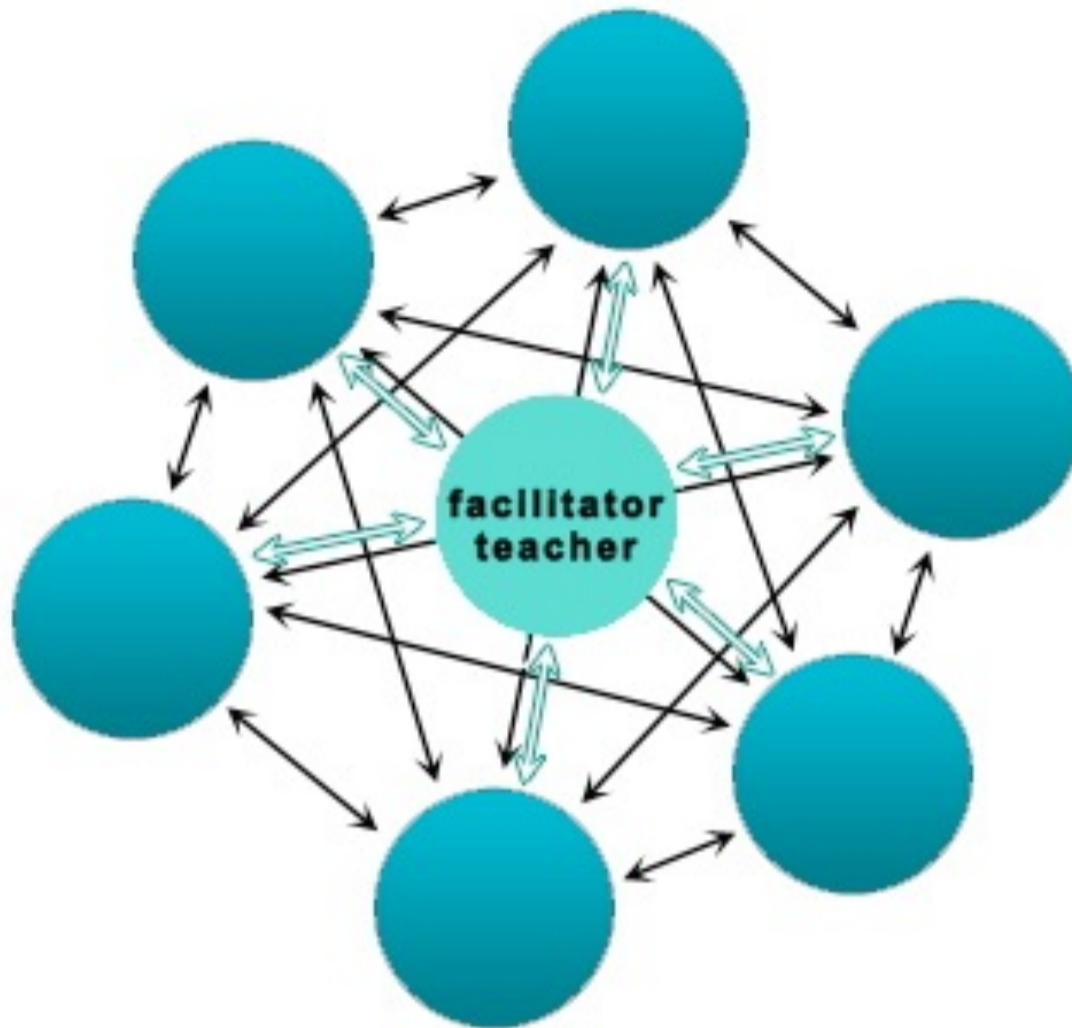
Such a profound shift from *the external* to *the internal* involves every element of a believer's relationship with God and with man. The choices you make on a daily level have to emanate from reasons that you have already established in your heart beforehand.

Obedience that comes from a trusting relationship with God was never intended to be haphazard. That is why the halakhic process of knowing why you do what you do was so foundational for the Newer Testament writers and for those who follow Jesus today.

The restoration of the collective called-out ones of Christ, however, is witnessing a return to the establishment of personal *halakhahs* for daily life by apperceiving both the Older and Newer Testaments for the truth they proclaim. Whenever the “family of saints” — any local gathering of brothers and sisters in union with Christ Jesus — got together in the first century, it was a “family reunion” of those who freely participated with each other.

The **shepherd/teacher** of the fellowship operated as a facilitator/teacher in discussions. Giftings from the Spirit were manifested through each person for the common good to edify and strengthen the entire “household” of God, His family (see Ephesians 2:18,19).

And as with any household, there was always the opportunity for listeners to **ask questions** or make a comment when another “family member” was sharing counsel or instruction.



An important point to remember:

No one individual operated as a *sacerdotal* at these family gatherings to deliver a “sermon” **(a word that’s not found in Scripture)**.

What’s the difference between today’s religious “preaching”, and “dialoguing” among gathered followers of Jesus?

Let’s check out “preaching” first.

*“Immediately he **preached** [from kerusso] the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20, NKJV).*

*“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone **preaching** [from kerusso] to them? And how can they **preach** [from kerusso] unless they are sent?” (Romans 10:14,15, NIV).*

*“And so I have made it my aim to **preach the gospel** [from euagglo], not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation” (Romans 15:20, NKJV).*

The Greek word *kerusso* is used 32 times in the Newer Testament, and means to preach the gospel as a herald proclaiming a message. It's directly related to *presenting the gospel*, the good news of the kingdom of God and salvation in Christ to people who haven't heard it before, or who have just recently heard it and need a fuller picture of what it means to them.

Most often, preaching was connected with *evangelizing unbelievers*. (The Greek word *euangello* — to evangelize by proclaiming the good news — is used 18 times in the same context as preaching the good news to those who aren't yet in the family of Christ.)

Jesus Himself “preached” the good news of the kingdom and “evangelized” those who had yet to trust in Him. He even preached in the synagogue to unbelieving Jews there. BUT, this preaching wasn't to people who had already trusted in Him as Lord and Messiah! The goal of preaching was to confront unbelievers with the claims of Jesus Christ. They were also confronted with their own need as sinners to repent and be born of the Spirit so that they might be reconciled with God the Father (Matthew 20:17-28). This method of preaching and evangelizing was an “initiation” dedicated, if you will, to a non-believer entering new birth by the Spirit.

Note this:

Scripture doesn't describe “preaching” to the called-out who already are indwelled by the Spirit to follow Jesus!

**Biblical Application
Through Mutual Discussion**



When people discuss a matter or even argue about it, *there's give and take* — one side speaks, then the other. That's *dialogue*, not monologue. Among the household of God were brothers and sisters in Christ who *dialogued* — they had conversations back and forth when they gathered together! And in their service to one another, each one had some sort of oral contribution which could be discussed for application to their lives:

*“How is it then, brothers? **Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification**”* (1Corinthians 14:26,NKJV).

*“And they **reasoned among themselves** [NIV - discussed it among themselves], saying, “If we say, “From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’”* (Matthew 21:25, NKJV).

*“On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul **spoke to** [literally, **dialogued with**] the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight”* (Acts 20:7, NIV). [KJV says Paul “preached unto them”]

Various forms of the Greek word *dialogoma* are used in these verses, but all have similar meaning involving more than one person: to reason through interacting with others (see Mark 11:31); to discuss among yourselves or reason among yourselves (as in Matthew 16:7); to talk a matter over (as in Luke 20:14). This discussion can also have heated words, as when Jesus asked the disciples, “*What were you **arguing about** [literally, **dialoguing about**] on the road?*” (Mark 9:33).

In the Newer Testament, dialogue implies *interaction* between a hearer and a speaker, and assumes a verbal response on the part of the hearer. 1 Corinthians 14 encourages participation by multiple speakers, as does 1 Corinthians 12:7,14. In Ephesians 4:11-13, Christ bestows special abilities on some of His own to help prepare the rest for works of service — the essential goal of vv. 7-16 — and all of these involve discussion with one another.

That's also why our Lord's plan for His family includes a *plurality of elders*, a body of the “gray-bearded” who oversee followers of Jesus. They “feed” His flock through *discussion of putting God's Word into practice*, and protect the spiritual family from wolves with compromising and deceitful words. These older men lead through *wise experience* and *godly counsel* based on God's Word as they apply it themselves (Hebrews 13:7). This interchange of shared wisdom is the

“continuation” of growth in the less mature in their relationship with the Living Lord.

Consider too Acts 20:7-11. Paul wasn't engaging in a monologue. As he spoke to this gathering of family in Jesus, people responded and asked questions, which were then answered and discussed — back and forth! Literally, Paul “**dialogued with them**”, and as the honored guest, he was able to continue the discussion until everything that needed to be said was said — even if young Eutychus was overcome by carbon monoxide from all the burning oil lamps!

This same word indicating *dialogue* is also used in Acts 17:2; 18:4; 18:19; 19:8; 24:12,25. And in Jude 9, the archangel Michael contends with the devil through “argumentative dialogue” with him over Moses' body.

 **What to take away from this discussion:**

Nowhere in Scripture does one person speak to those gathered week after week as the “minister” to deliver monologue sermons — and certainly there's no “ministerial professional” cited in the Newer Testament. When the household of our Father who are united in Christ through His indwelling Spirit come together as a faith family, each one is free and encouraged to bear witness to however the Spirit wants to speak through them or use them to serve one another. Verbal interchange — what we know as *conversation* — makes vivid the reality of how much each one in Christ *needs* that aspect of verbal one anothering.

Chapter 6

Use Talking Circles: Put Up The Fence!!!

Establishing halakhahs in which everyone commits themselves to the decision to is best accomplished through talking circles. They create the best opportunity for discovering what's right rather than creating an adversarial climate of who's right. If you truly love the Lord Jesus, you will find joy in searching the Bible for a righteous and obedient framework for your life and for those who are affected by your *halakhahs*.

We believe that as the Hebraic Restoration continues, God's people will delight in applying His Word to all areas of their lives. The personal *halakhahs* they establish will be a visible sign of their love relationship with Him.

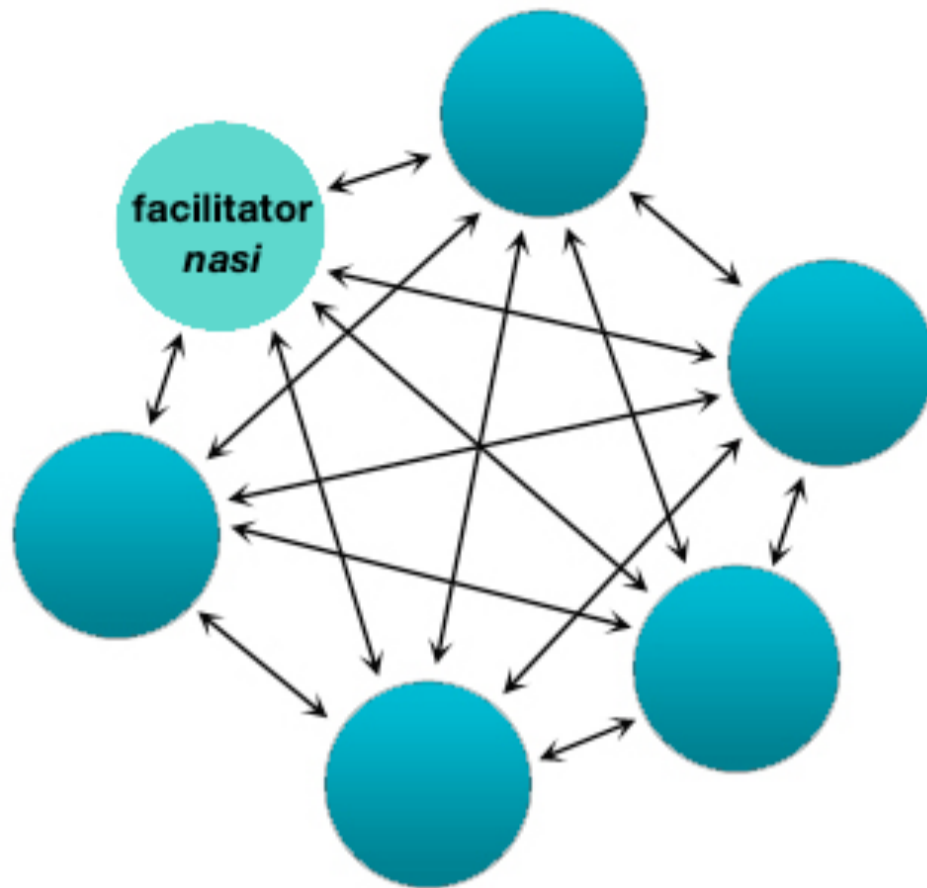
The basic format for *group discussion* to decide the correct *halakhah* for a situation is the *yeshiva* (yeh-shee'-vuh). The Jewish people, and therefore the earliest Church, had long been accustomed to gathering to pray and to study the Bible. In these groups they regularly discussed the Word of God in order to determine how He wanted them to apply it.



The deliberations were very democratic, with issues settled by the confirmation of two or three or by a simple majority vote, whichever was appropriate for the situation. This process underscored the Biblical axiom that “*in the multitude of counselors is safety*” (Proverbs 11:14; 24:6).

We mentioned in the previous chapter that the shepherd/teacher of a fellowship operated as a facilitator/teacher discussion. In his absence one person was recognized as the moderator of the discussion group, the *nasi* (nah'-see), or “prince.” Rather than lording himself over the others or forcing his own opinion, the *nasi* facilitated the dialogue until the group collectively reached an understanding of God's will on the issue at hand.

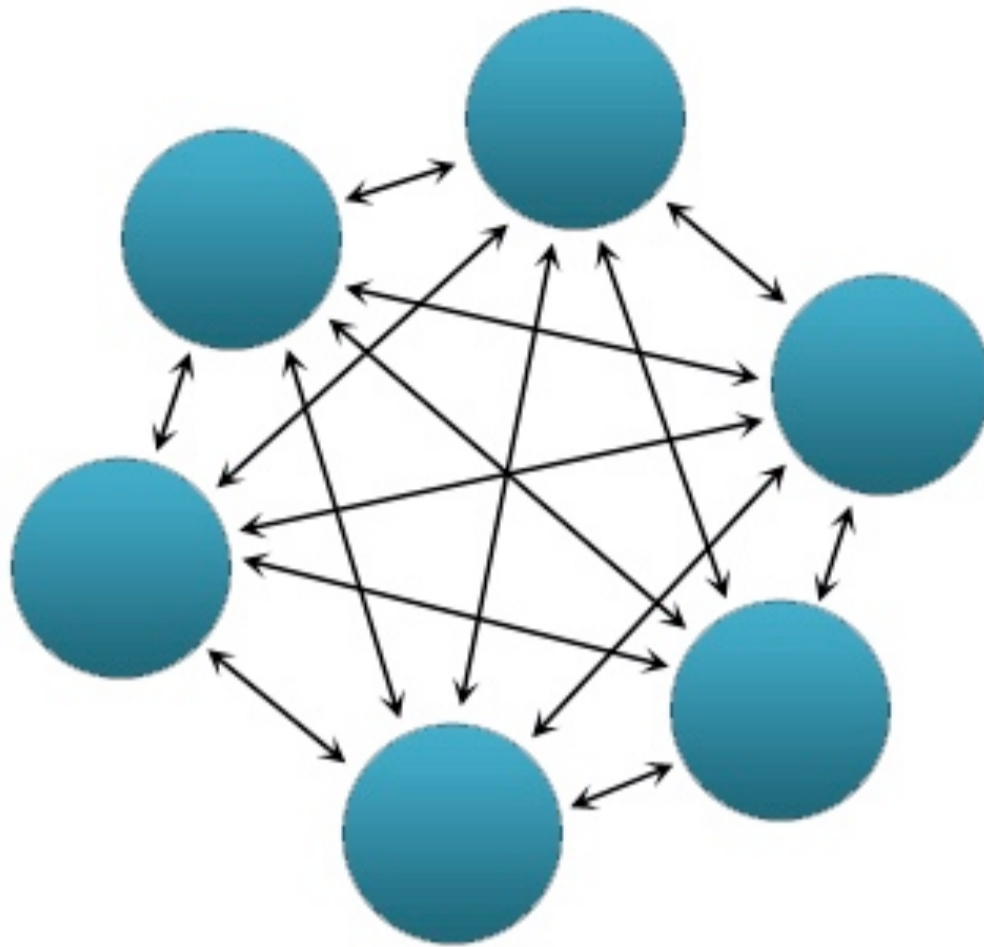
Having A Trusted Facilitator/*Nasi* Reduces Arguments



You can see this pattern in the Newer Testament in Acts 15. The apostles and elders of the church had gathered in Jerusalem to discuss the issue of whether Gentile believers should be circumcised. James served as the *nasi* and coordinated the discussion. He then summarized the *halakhah* for the Gentiles: “*We should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood*” (Acts 15:20).

Note that their response addressed not only circumcision (see v. 24) but also pagan practices that violated Hebrew Scripture. This *halakhah* was carried to the Gentile believers by faithful and mature leaders who could model and teach the righteous way of living that would counter their pagan lifestyles.

Talking Circles Are Indispensable In Developing Halakhahs



This Newer Testament model of searching the Scriptures together to discern God’s will for your family, faith community, or business is just as applicable for believers today. The basic premise of *halakhah* is that the *Bible applies to all areas of our lives*. Paul himself attested to the value of the Hebrew Scriptures in his walk:

*“I admit that I follow the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that **agrees with the Law** and that is **written in the Prophets**”* (Acts 24:14).

Chapter 7

Needs Or Concerns That Require Halakhahs

As a starting point, think about this short list of possible *halakhahs* you may want to establish for yourself and your family:

- spousal responsibilities
- family authority
- interpersonal conflict
- business relationships
- TV/computer viewing guidelines
- friendships/cellphone use
- household chores
- alcohol use
- birth control
- finances
- dating
- relationship with in-laws
- child training/schooling
- music

Sometimes the halakhic process begins as part of a topical discussion, perhaps on any of the topics listed above. More often, something is a pressing concern facing someone. The matter may spring from a statement such as:

“Every time my parents visit, I’m a basket case when they leave.”

“My friend at work is always saying rotten things about her husband.”

“When my husband listens to [a certain talk show host], he gets agitated and angry with the family.”

“My Mom called and told me my Dad may need to be put in a nursing home.”

“Our teenage son is starting to listen to music we have a difficult time with.”

“My best friend at school is starting to use drugs.”

“Our daughter is living with a man. How should we respond to her?”

“We’re not doing well financially. My wife wants to get a job and put the kids in daycare.”

“When my son came home from school today, he said he has to read a book about homosexuality as an alternative life style.”

“My brother asked me to become a partner with him in his business.”

Please take note of this:

Followers of Jesus who are willing to put up the fence together in agreement with the Holy Spirit will see peace and protection built. To the extent that you do not establish *halakhahs* for yourself and your family, faith community, or business, you remain exposed to satanic attack, harassment, and oppression in those particular areas.

Chapter 8

The Four Steps Needed In Establishing Halakhahs

Applying God's Commands Through Mutual Discussion



When you are prompted by a need or concern such as one of those listed on the previous page, begin to prayerfully seek God to determine how His Word would apply.

1 Prayer.

✓ To establish a *halakhah* for your particular issue, pray. Ask for a spirit of wisdom and revelation (see Ephesians 1:17), entreating the Father to convey His will regarding your issue or concern.

2 Bible passages.

✓ Next, ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind any verses or passages from the Bible that would apply to your situation. Don't try to apply anything to your situation *until* you are sure that you have compiled all possible biblical references. Some verses will be more pertinent than others. That is, you'll recognize one or more of the verses as more foundational to the issue. Other verses will add understanding to the foundation.

When you have taken the extra pain to pursue all the biblical leads prompted by the Holy Spirit, a sense of peace will probably rest on you and anyone who may be sharing this investigation with you.

3 Biblical application.

✓ Armed with the appropriate verses and passages, you can address your problem and concern. Be careful to not get into “if—then” reasoning as you try to apply the Word to the situation. The normal tendency after pondering the Bible application to the situation is to immediately draw conclusions and ask questions. What will this decision cost you? How will this affect others? What changes will you need to go through if you decide to live by this new conviction?

No matter how strong the urge is to weigh the personal cost of your decision — don’t! You must first determine in your heart that you do have the correct biblical application for your situation. The Holy Spirit will again give you peace if this is what God wants for you.

4 Action to take.

✓ Only after you are convinced in your heart that you have correctly applied God’s Word to your situation is it time to take the next step, application of grace. *Grace* is the power and desire to uphold God’s truth in your life no matter what it costs you.

Remember, you are applying *halakhahs* to your life because of your *love for Jesus*. The goal is not right behavior for its own sake. If correct behavior in the hopes of gaining God’s favor is your motivation, you will become prideful. You may even develop a disdain for others who don’t live or think the way you do. God’s grace will enable you to keep your new conviction because of your desire to lovingly obey Him. Continue to pray for grace. And repent of your failure for not having known these new truths or lived by them before this time.

If this method hasn’t been part of your faith enactment before, it may take a little time to develop the halakhic process for yourself and for those close to you.

- **Be patient with each other!**
- **Each of the four steps is important.**
- **Go over them again to be sure you understand the importance of each one.**

The Halakhic Process Requires Your Trust

Establishing Halakhahs Requires:

- **Your Trust In The Holy Spirit,**
- **And Your Mutual Trust And Conviction**

If you are confronting an issue or situation on which you and your family cannot reach agreement or are unable to discern what you should do, solicit the help of one or two trusted, close friends. Some of the rabbis around the time of Jesus taught that whenever the Torah was studied by two or three, the Holy Spirit was there with them.

The confirmation of two or three is a biblical pattern for believers today. *“Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses”* (2 Corinthians 13:1, Matthew 18:16, apperceived from Deuteronomy 19:15). The Holy Spirit will strengthen you to complete what you started if you are purposing in your heart to obey God. The most important thing is to continue to pray and remain at peace.

To come to resolution, follow the example of Scripture. The *yeshiva* principles apply to an intimate small group in your living room as well as to larger gatherings of believers dealing with issues that impact a congregation or business. *Pray for the Spirit’s guidance and base everything that is shared on the Bible.* Use your concordance to identify all pertinent verses as you discover how the Word might apply to this particular situation.

Begin the process of discussion by choosing one person to serve as a facilitator of the dialogue. Agree to disagree with mutual respect and affirmation. Encourage everyone to speak, recognizing that interruption of one another may be needed to keep the discussion flowing.

If emotions become heightened at times, don’t be concerned as long as the emotions aren’t aimed at anyone else’s character! The intensity with which you hold onto what God seems to be showing you is an indication that the issue is more than cerebral to you!

Emphasize “*what’s* right before God,” not “*who’s* right.”

Don’t be too hasty to come to a resolution. God wants each member of the group to develop spiritual maturity by learning to think for himself and take responsibility for his own convictions. That won’t happen if people lean on the input of a perceived authority figure.

As you develop different *halakhahs* within your family, business, or faith community, you will face:

- a season for *separation* from your past patterns.
- a time of *initiation* into living by the new truths you are applying.
- a period of *transition* for you and your household, faith community, or business as you grow in your conviction to live by the new truths.
- the possibility for *confusion* as the adjustments are taking place.

Be prayerfully patient with yourself and with each other! Establishing a *halakhah* is a process, a peaceful process because you love God and desire to uphold Him in every area of your life. The Holy Spirit participates through His *rhema*, that is, His specific guidance for you through the Word.

Whether within your family, business, or faith community, establishing the biblical basis for your actions and decisions is critical for spiritual growth and maturity. Ignorance of God’s ways is not bliss, but heartache and frustration.

As you write down your *halakhahs*, you may want to keep them in a special journal. Perhaps you could establish a *Family Halakhah book* for you and your children to refer to. This collection could explain how you as a family have applied the Word of God in a particular way to certain situations.



You could develop a home fellowship or a gathering of home fellowships *Halakhah* book that includes *halakhahs* that have been discussed and applied by the community at large. Another section of this community book could contain a library of individual *halakhahs* which different members have applied to their lives, families, or businesses. These ideas could provide a good reference for others who are considering and/or establishing *halakhahs* regarding the same issues.

Remember, however, that the same verses that one family has used to verify God's will for their particular situation may indeed be used by another family to come to a distinctly different *halakhah*! For instance, verses regarding diligence of parents to raise their children may lead one family to home school, another to a Christian school, and yet another to the public school.

The halakhic *application* may differ but the process for each family to determine God's will for their situation will stay the same: Pray. Seek out all possible scriptures that might apply. Prayerfully narrow down the selection to the most applicable. Apply these by grace.

Chapter 10

There's Much To Learn From Nehemiah's Example



As you build halakhic foundations for your home, faith community, or business, hindrances to accomplishing that purpose will parallel those faced by Nehemiah as he set about to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This should come as no surprise, as God's people in all eras are at war against a deadly spiritual enemy who seeks to devour and destroy. This foe prowls around looking for access to any area not totally yielded to God.

A home, faith community, or business *without halakhahs* is similar to the *unprotected walls* of Jerusalem which Nehemiah sought to rebuild. To the extent that you have not established building blocks of *halakhahs* for each issue or situation in your life, you are vulnerable to spiritual infiltration in those areas.

What determination Nehemiah displayed as he coordinated the construction of those walls! And what opposition any of Jesus's followers will encounter as they establish halakhic walls. Pause now to read through the book of Nehemiah.

As you go through the following passages, meditate on the conditions Nehemiah encountered and the actions he took. Visualize the same elements and actions in your home, faith community, or business—anywhere you are attempting to build a *halakhah* of spiritual protection.

1. The walls of Jerusalem were in sorry condition. The very people for whom the walls had been built to protect were now vulnerable to further attack.

“They said to me, ‘Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire’” (1:3).

If you have been a Christian for some time and have not begun to build walls of biblical application, this process may initially seem overwhelming. The broken walls and burned gates may represent gaps in your spiritual defenses, resulting in spiritual agitation that creates tension and apprehension in the relationships in your home, faith community, or business.

2. A season of spiritual preparation was needed before the people could begin to rebuild. Prayer, fasting, and repentance may be necessary before you proceed:

*When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days **I mourned and fasted and prayed** before the God of heaven. Then I said: “O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who **keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and obey His commands**, let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer Your servant is praying before You day and night for Your servants, the people of Israel. **I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s house, have committed against You.***

*We have acted very wickedly toward You. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws You gave Your servant Moses. Remember the instruction You gave Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but **if you return to Me and obey My commands**, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for My Name.’ They are Your servants and Your people, whom You redeemed by Your great strength and Your mighty hand. **O Lord, let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of this Your servant and to the prayer of Your servants who delight in revering Your name.** Give Your servant success today by granting him favor” (1:4-11, emphasis added).*

Before you start to build *halakhahs*, you may want to *repent* for your failure to know and to uphold the commands of God that were evident in His Word. If your family, faith community, or business personnel did not demonstrate obedience to God’s will in the past, it may be wise to repent for the sins of your ancestors as did Nehemiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel on behalf of their people.

The process of rebuilding will also require you to seek His wisdom in order to know how to proceed:

*“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should **ask God**, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him”* (James 1:5).

3. Nehemiah sacrificed position and personal comfort in order to involve himself in fulfilling God’s purpose:

*“And I answered the king, ‘If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him **send me to the city in Judah** where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it’”* (2:5).

Humble self-sacrifice is critical if you are to build your walls of *halakhah*: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise”* (Isaiah 51:17). Your family and the others who will be affected by the *halakhah* you are establishing will watch you to see what sacrificial adjustments you are making. *Leadership*, not rules forced onto others by you, is key to your successful implementation of the *halakhah* at hand.

4. Before reconstruction could begin, Nehemiah inspected the walls to ascertain the breadth of the task ahead:

“So I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate” (2:15).

Be assured that God is bigger than the mountain of rubble you may see in your situation. His grace will continue to be poured forth in response to your diligence in pursuing obedience. Perhaps no one in your family, business, or faith community shares the same concern that you have for an issue or situation.

Nehemiah also pondered the status of the walls alone for awhile before involving others. Prayerfully weigh the issue before your Father in heaven, seeking His assurance to press on or to put it to rest for the time being. Each step of obedience that He asks of you will be just that—*one step at a time*. Don’t be overwhelmed by either the situation itself or by your seeming isolation in the matter.

5. Nehemiah needed the cooperation of others to complete the task:

*“Then I said to them, ‘You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, **let us rebuild** the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.’ I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, ‘**Let us start rebuilding.**’ So they began this good work” (2:17,18).*

Your rebuilding will quite often require the cooperative effort and help of others as you construct your *halakhahs*. Your helpers may be the members of your family, faith community, or business. Believers who can assist you with their varying spiritual gifts can be invaluable at this time. Intercession, prophecy, words of knowledge and wisdom can make your work and direction that much more certain. (See our free online book *God’s Instruments for War: Discovering and Coordinating Spiritual Gifts as Weapons of Warfare* for further information on how gifts of the Spirit can be used in direction and guidance.)

When those who are seeking God’s will with you in this matter are assured that He has given you direction, they will be encouraged to persevere with you until resolution is achieved.

6. Each gate and section of the wall was built by specific individuals working together toward the common goal:

*“So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people **worked with all their heart**” (4:6).*

Remember to establish an initial perimeter of vital *halakhahs* in the areas that are most affected. Your home needs to be a *sanctuary and refuge* for each member of your family. Identify the areas that are interfering with that goal, and work together to achieve it. Rather than assigning blame for shortcomings, *work as a team* by pointing out the need for cooperation by each one.

This same principle applies to your home fellowship, congregation, or business. *Identify the halakhah* to be lived by, then determine *each one’s role* in achieving it.

Chapter 11

Expect The Demonic Forces To Oppose You



1. The first opposition Nehemiah faced came in the form of derogatory words from those who had no relationship with the God of Israel. False accusations about his motives were hurled at him.

*“But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they **mocked and ridiculed** us. ‘What is this you are doing?’ they asked. ‘Are you rebelling against the king?’” (2:19).*

The Hebrew Bible often presents *physical* examples of what we today encounter *spiritually*. If you are obeying God, taunts are inevitable from those who do not understand your purpose or reason. You are now building in areas where the enemy once held sway. Satan does not give up without a struggle, and will agitate against you those who are not obediently walking with the Lord.

God knows your vulnerability to demonic forces. Just as the Lord revealed Achan’s sin to Joshua and exposed Ananias and Sapphira’s deceit, He will bring to account those with you who are not true to Him.

2. Because Nehemiah knew that he was obeying the Lord, he was assured in his heart that the rebuilding would be accomplished.

*“I answered them by saying, ‘**The God of heaven will give us success. We His servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it**’” (2:20).*

Overcome your opposition with the confidence that God wants you to establish righteous principles on which to stand. Again, help from those with spiritual gifts

other than yours can help sustain your confidence as you implement what He has made clear to you through His Word and the Spirit.

Ezra, a contemporary of Nehemiah, speaks of the assistance the prophets gave:

*“Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the **prophets of God were with them, helping them**”* (Ezra 5:1,2).

God has planted each believer in a spiritual extended family. Ask those nearest to you to help you with accountability in the area in which God is prompting obedience.

3. Nehemiah and his compatriots faced not only personal ridicule but also denigration of their work.

“Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, ‘What they are building—if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!’ Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from Your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders. So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart” (4:3-6).

Expect that the adversary will try to get you to doubt your ability to complete the task. Don’t be surprised if he also arouses people to voice negative conclusions or insinuations about the position you take. The very ones who are mocking you are probably the ones that God is chasing down to establish their own *halakhahs*!

Overcome your opposition by prayer and by keeping yourself focused on the task He’s assigned you. Remember that His grace and power will enable you to persevere.

4. Those who were angry about the reconstruction plotted with others to stop the work from progressing.

*“But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They **all plotted together** to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it....They were all **trying to frighten us**, thinking, ‘Their hands will get too*

weak for the work, and it will not be completed.’ But I prayed, ‘Now strengthen my hands’” (4:7,8; 6:9).

You can anticipate a conspiracy in the spiritual realm to overwhelm and discourage you. Ezra writes about the opposition:

*“Then the peoples around them set out **to discourage** the people of Judah and **make them afraid** to go on building. They hired counselors to **work against them** and **frustrate their plans**” (Ezra 4:4,5).*

Don’t be surprised that Satan may conspire against you through other believers in whose lives he has a demonic stronghold. As Paul warned Timothy, *“And that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has **taken them captive to do his will**” (2 Timothy 2:26).*

Those who are “captive” to the devil’s will normally are people who habitually excuse their disobedience to the Lord. (See our free online workbook ***Demolishing Strongholds: God’s Way to Spiritual Freedom*** for further discussion of spiritual warfare and demonic oppression.)

5. Whether the assault came from enemies who were against God or from those who knew Him but were faltering in their resolve, Nehemiah understood that his only source of strength was the Lord.

“But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat. Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, ‘The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.’ Also our enemies said, ‘Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.’ Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, ‘Wherever you turn, they will attack us’” (4:9-12).

Overcome the opposition by watchfulness and prayer. Just as Nehemiah posted a guard, keep yourself immersed in the Word and in heart relationship with Him: *“Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).*

In some instances those around you may become discouraged as you try to follow what the Lord has revealed to you. They may feel that they are not seeing

any spiritual victory in this decision. You can overcome these spiritual assaults by steadfast courage and unswerving trust in God's faithfulness.

6. Nehemiah recognized how dependent he was on the efforts and courage of reliable fellow men to achieve his cause.

"Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, 'Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.' I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do" (4:13,14; 7:2).

Enlist the help of those you know are courageous in their faith walk. Ask them to stand with you in fasting and prayer until that which God wants to accomplish in your family, business, or faith community is achieved.

7. Not everyone who would ultimately benefit from the faithful perseverance of Nehemiah and his builders wanted to pay the price of patient endurance.

"Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. Some were saying, 'We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.' Others were saying, 'We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.'"

Still others were saying, 'We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others' (5:1-5).

Selfish interest, especially by those who want to keep the status quo, may hinder your resolve to obey God in that particular area you are dealing with. Others in your business or faith community may feel indignant by a new step or course of direction facing them. Some would rather go on with the way things had been before the new *halakhah* was introduced. You must, however, stand firm in that which the Lord has revealed.

8. Nehemiah confronted his people with their sins, bringing them to repentance. He then continued all his days to live an exemplary life.

*"When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind and then **accused the nobles and officials**... They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say. So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. **Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God** to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?"... "We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. **We will do as you say**"...At this the whole assembly said, "Amen," and praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised.*

*Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor... **I devoted myself to the work on this wall**. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land. Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations" (5:6-17).*

Overcome self-interest by *rebuking and correcting* those who sin, assuring them of your *love and concern* for them. Be a self-sacrificing example of integrity and faithfulness before God. As you commit your efforts to God in order that He may be glorified, He will bring success in His time: *"So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days"* (6:15). Your success in establishing a *perimeter of halakhahs* will diminish the confidence of the enemy:

*"When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done **with the help of our God**" (6:16).*

Chapter 12

When Your Wall Is Up



1. Nehemiah and Ezra the priest recognized how vital it was for the people to be reminded of the truth of Scripture and to understand it in their hearts.

*“They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and **giving the meaning so that the people could understand** what was being read. ‘This day is sacred to the Lord. Do not mourn or weep.’ For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law” (8:8,9).*

When you have established a wall of truth around yourself and your family, you will discover that you can more clearly understand biblical truth from the framework of applying it to your life. Before this time, you had probably agreed cognitively with the Bible. Once you discover the peaceful comfort of personal *halakhahs*, you will cherish the mighty truths that have become your blocks of protection.

You might tend to harbor regrets over past mistakes that have negatively impacted your own life or the lives of those you love. Appropriate the Hebraic understanding that *from this day forward* you will trust and obey what He reveals to you.

2. The Israelites repented for their sins and those of their forefathers, offering no excuses for either the transgressions of their ancestors or for their own failures.

*“Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed **their sins and the wickedness of their fathers...** ‘In all that*

has happened, You have been just; You have acted faithfully, while we did wrong'” (9:2,33).

When you confess your sins before your heavenly Father, He is faithful to forgive, just as John apperceived from Nehemiah: *“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).* Ask forgiveness of those whom you’ve sinned against and *make restitution* where appropriate.

God doesn’t remove the memories of the past but He does heal the sting of the memory. Use the grace you’ve received from Him to *comfort and help others* who are in the mire of the same difficult situations that you have faced.

3. After the wall had been erected as a perimeter, doors were installed to control who came into the city.

“After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed” (7:1).

When your wall of *halakhahs* is in place, you have the ability to *control demonic access* to your home, faith community, or business. Your *halakhahs* provide a *defined line of separation* between the good that is within your gate and the evil that is on the outside. This wall enables you to turn from the things which are contrary to your relationship with your Lord. Note that when the gate doors had been installed, gatekeepers were posted to guard the gate, and singers and Levites assigned.

Besides guarding the security of your home, you need to maintain an environment of *praise and personal holiness*. At the dedication of the wall, the men led the way in rejoicing as their families accompanied them: *“And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away” (12:43).*

God has designed that households headed by men be protected and spiritually led by the husband and father. Households without male leadership need to cry out to the Lord for His high tower of protection.

4. Not all those who participated in the rebuilding of the walls or who returned from the exile chose to live in the protected city.

*“Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. The people commended all the men who **volunteered to live in Jerusalem**” (11:1,2).*

Each follower of Jesus must decide whether he or she wants to live within the boundaries of halakhic walls or take a chance outside these parameters. Determining from Scripture *where and how God wants you to live* really comes down to these questions: “What would Jesus decide in this matter? How would He know that this choice is right for here and now?” When you have prayed about this with the help of those close to you, you will then be able to discern the will of God regarding the timing and details of your application.

Chapter 13

Your Halakhahs Will Be Tested

Not everyone will agree with your *halakhahs*. Consider three of the *halakhahs* established by Nehemiah:

1. The people agreed to *separate themselves* from known relationships that were evil before God. They also covenanted to abstain in the future from relationships that had been forbidden by God.

"The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand—all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our God. We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons" (10:28-30, emphasis added).

When God makes clear to you the path He has revealed through His Word, you may discover that some of your friends or relationships no longer desire your companionship. Perhaps they are feeling convicted that God wants to do a similar work in them. Maybe they are just not interested in what you are now choosing to do. Remember that God has called *you* to love and serve Him; all other individuals must decide in what direction He is calling them.

2. The people agreed to honor the Sabbath and other holy days, forgoing the business that the world's system demanded in order to bless and serve God.

"When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts" (10:31).

There are times when the choices God reveals to you will *contradict the world's values*. Keep in mind that the fruit of the Spirit cannot be measured by material standards. God's blessings meet the needs of the heart and are not always evident or even desirable to those not yielded to God's will and ways.

3. All the people together promised to provide for the needs of those who ministered to the Lord on their behalf.

“We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God” (10:32).

Ask yourself if you are shortchanging the furtherance of God’s Kingdom by *holding for personal use* the resources that He wants you to devote to His purposes. What God reveals to you as a *halakhah* for your home or business may not be His plan for anyone else. Only His grace and power will enable you to follow His direction without trying to impose your way on others!

Chapter 14

The Dire Consequences For Not Keeping Halakhahs



Carefully note Nehemiah's responses and actions in the face of disobedience.

1. Forbidden relationships were rekindled during Nehemiah's absence.

*"But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God. I was greatly displeased and **threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room.** [Tobiah was an Ammonite, a tribe forbidden by Moses from entering the assembly of God.]*

*Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah. **I rebuked them and called curses down on them.** I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. **I made them take an oath in God's name** and said: "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves" (13:6-8, 23-25, emphasis added).*

Keep your heart pliable and open to **listen to correction or rebuke** given by those who are close to you. They may be the Lord's "course adjusters" for you if you have missed a warning from the Spirit within.

2. The Sabbath was once again broken as the desire for profit and worldly gain overcame righteousness.

"In those days I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of

*loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore **I warned them against selling food on that day.** Men from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. **I rebuked the nobles** of Judah and said to them, “What is this wicked thing you are doing—desecrating the Sabbath day?”...When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day” (13:15-19, emphasis added).*

It is so very tempting to rationalize actions that are acceptable to the world (or even to other believers). But if our Father has made something very clear to you, your family, or your business, you must keep focused on *pleasing Him*.

3. Provision ceased for those who served before the Lord. Those who had been assigned duty before the Lord had abandoned their responsibilities.

*“I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites **had not been given to them,** and that all the Levites and singers responsible for the service **had gone back to their own fields.** So I rebuked the officials and asked them, ‘Why is the house of God neglected?’ **Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts.** All Judah brought the tithes of grain, new wine and oil into the storerooms” (13:10-12, emphasis added).*

Those with whom you have established a *halakhah* may need some monitoring until that becomes an inner response or value. Condemnation is not appropriate, but *follow-through* on the part of each one does need to be encouraged.

Chapter 15

Concluding Thoughts

You may become discouraged when your *halakhahs* are tested. Prosperous western Christianity concludes that if you do everything according to God's way, you will live peacefully ever after. The reality is that because you are a follower of Christ, you will be *at war with a relentless enemy* until the day you die.

The *halakhahs* you build up in the Lord will encounter demonic attack and opposition. Just like Nehemiah, you must *repent* for crumbling breaches and *rebuild* the *halakhahs* that have fallen.

Although the establishment of *halakhahs* restricts the enemy's access to your home, faith community, or business, this should not be the overriding reason to build these walls. The ultimate goal for you is to *love God completely*. Your application of His Word to the varied areas of your life is a visible sign of your loving obedience to Him:

*“Finally, brothers, we instructed you **how to live in order to please God**, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more”* (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

You will not be justified in heaven by establishing *halakhahs*. Your trust in the shed blood of Jesus has already justified you. *Halakhahs* can be understood only as a loving response to your Lord:

*“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Live as children of light** (for the fruit of light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and **find out what pleases the Lord**”* (Ephesians 5:8-10).

God has called His people to *bear much fruit*. Anything that we can do to cooperate fully with the Holy Spirit to bring this about will find us shining as lights in a dark and needy world.

If you and those close to you in the faith can incorporate the halakhic process into your faith walk, you will discover an entirely different communication style when you get together. No longer will you just discuss biblical truths. Instead,

there will be a yearning to *work together cooperatively* to apply God's Word to your lives. At the same time, you will perceive an ever-increasing love for Jesus as you build *halakhahs* through the prompting and the power of the Spirit.



- Trust in the indwelling Spirit in you.
- Have confidence in the Spirit of your Lord in each other.
- Be patient and respect each other's input.
- Trust that the peace of Christ will rest upon each of you when you apply God's commands to your way of life.

You Need Halakhahs!

Halakhahs are Bible-based applications for your life as you follow Jesus. These aren't a code of behavioral rules. Rather, they are an expression of your love relationship with your Lord. Use this booklet on your own, or better still, go through it with your family and your faith community. Your halakhahs can help you face your life issues with spiritual peace and power!

You need to make halakhahs for all your life decisions like these (and more!):

- family authority
- child training
- sibling conflicts
- TV and social media
- dating
- in-law relationships
- finances
- business relationships



Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz

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