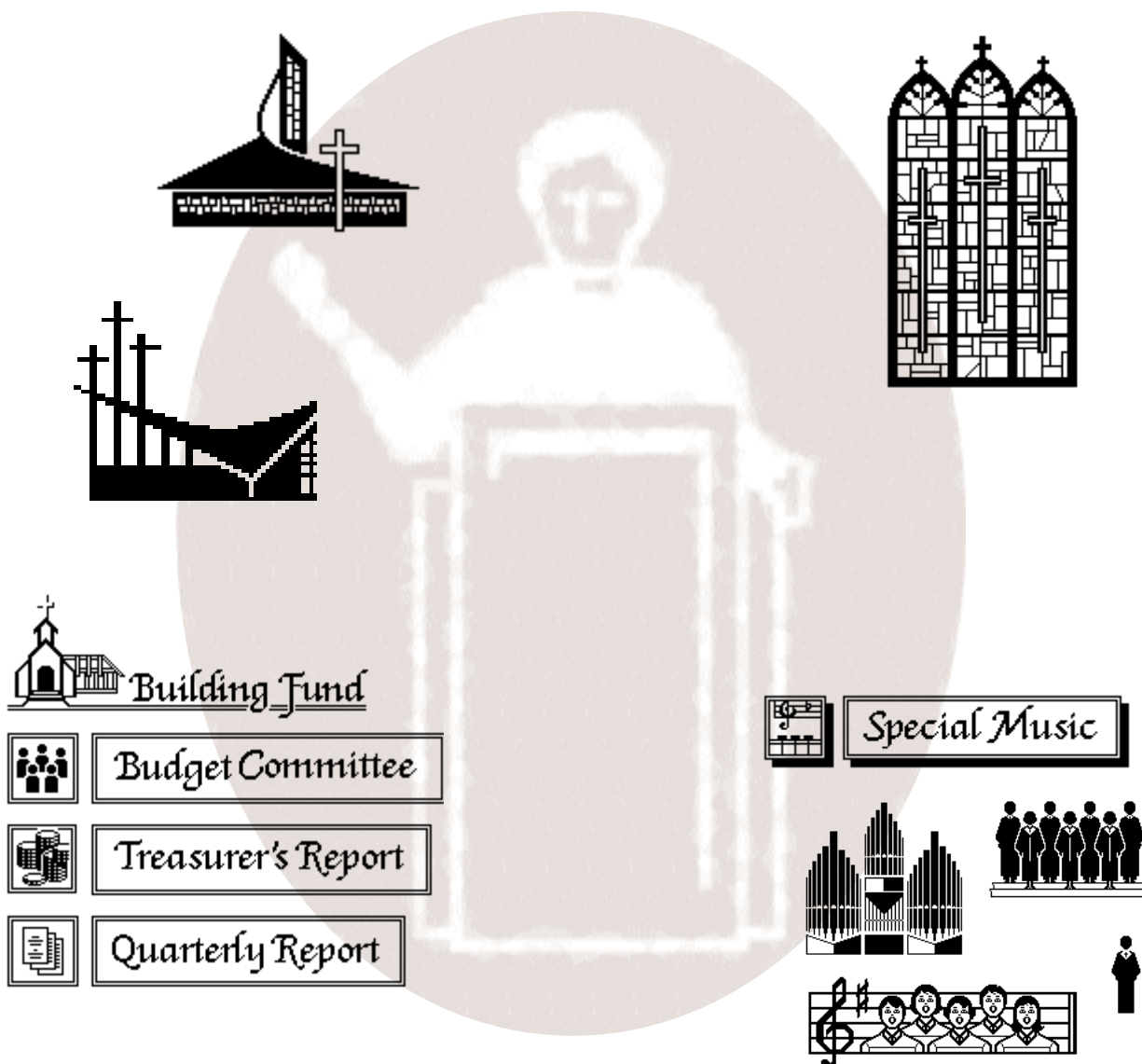


IMPUDENCE

Reflection of the Anti-Christ Spirit in Today's Church



by Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz
Restoration Ministries International

Email

Mike: mikedowgie@gmail.com

Sue: suegdowgie@gmail.com

www.Restorationministries.org



Restoration Ministries International

Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz

Introduction

Several months ago a man who ministers to over 300 house churches in China contacted me. Sadly he bemoaned the biblical error into which many of these gatherings were falling. The Chinese government has arrested and imprisoned most of the older men who have been shepherding the faith communities since the Communist takeover in 1949. Heresies of all sorts are rampant in the flocks bereft of wise elders.

While zealous in their hunger to serve the Lord, the young men and women who are left in the house churches have not lived long enough to gain the wisdom of experience and depth of humility. These come only with years on the potter's wheel of the Lord. Depth in scriptural understanding is sorely lacking as many strange interpretations and applications of biblical commands are overriding a trusting relationship with Jesus and a practical walking out of that trust.

Why is Satan focusing so much on undermining the influence of the older and wiser in faith communities around the world? A people devoid of wisdom is naïve and prone to stray from the narrow way of truth. Look around you. Satan has just about completed his work in the Church in the US with insidious doctrines that lure churchgoers into a faith that focuses on ease, entertainment, and self-fulfillment. Yet, the need for men and women of years and wisdom, mighty in the Lord, has never been greater.

Two examples from the world of nature will help define the problem more clearly.

Elephants Without Deference

A recent television broadcast on the Dateline program remarkably illustrated the devastation that results when mature influence and guidance is absent. In Africa 20 years ago, the National Park Service was faced with a ruinous overpopulation of elephants. To keep the animals from plundering valuable crops and defoliating the land, naturalists killed all the adult elephants, preserving only the young. As these youngsters matured, the male calves in particular grew violent, attacking and killing both rhinos and people. Their fierce, aggressive behavior was totally out of character. It was as though the restraint common to elephants had vanished — or had never developed.

The park naturalists were clueless as to who or what was responsible for attacking and killing so many rhinos. At first they blamed poachers. That still left unexplained, however, the vicious attacks on humans in the area. When they finally discovered that the

havoc was being caused by the young elephants, the rangers moved quickly. Each misbehaving elephant was issued a “rap sheet” similar to that of a street criminal to identify those with aggressive behavior. When a particular elephant accumulated too many points against his behavior, he was destroyed.

But that didn’t solve the real underlying problem.

Many hours of study later, the naturalists realized that male elephants, young ones especially, have such high testosterone levels that they need the restraining behavior of older elephant males to keep them in control. It was the mature males who taught the young to spar with one another to relieve their sexual tension. In essence, the older males taught the junior elephants a pecking order of *deference*. Desperate to restore order to this unruly community of young males, the naturalists imported adult males into the herd. Not long after, deference was established and more orderly behavior restored.

The Naked Goose

For many years we taught at a church retreat center that was part of a working farm. Each spring the air was filled with the squawking of goslings from our flock of stately gray Toulouse geese. One particular May, however, we noticed an alarming situation: The older geese kept plucking all the feathers off one particular gosling! Throughout the summer this gosling plodded around featherless, always slightly behind the rest of the flock. We thought the older geese were being mean, and were baffled as to how we could stop them from plucking the little guy. By late August, though, the adult birds slacked off their attacks, permitting the young goose to grow out its feathers. We were still mystified.

Late one night the following spring, we heard the geese raising a ruckus in the barnyard next to the retreat lodge. As I (Mike) ran out with my shotgun in hand, I could see by flashlight that all the older geese had formed a circle around the newly hatched goslings, much like wagon trains do in a western movie. Each adult took position along side another, necks fully extended, emitting loud hisses and honks. They were defending themselves against a fox attack! Now we could understand the wisdom of the mature geese when they had plucked that young gosling the previous summer. Somehow he had displayed an independent spirit. The older geese knew that in time he would fail in his communal responsibilities to the flock. Through plucking and ostracism, the young goose learned a valuable lesson in what it means to *belong*.

For animals as well as people, it takes time, patience, and repetition to pass along the skills necessary for offspring to survive. For some species, such as the grizzly bear, one-fourth of a cub’s entire life is spent with its mother just learning how to cope! God has designed this vital period of devoted parental attention so that the next generation can succeed.

Developing Faithful Successors

“For I have chosen [Abraham], so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him” (Genesis 18:19).

What is the legacy you'll leave *your* children?

Passing along to succeeding generations the skills and way of life that will *fulfill His purposes for them* is imperative to our God. He chose Abraham, the father of all who put their trust in Jesus, because He knew that Abraham would teach his children and his household the righteous ways of the Lord. What matters to God is not only the trusting obedience that you enact in your own generation. He is also vitally concerned with what you do to prepare the *next* generation to love and serve Him.

So many of God's purposes jump out in the following passages from Deuteronomy, chapter 6:

- *"These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life"* (vv.1,2). Do you see the connection between *your teaching* your children our Father's commands and *their learning* to fear Him? If there were no righteous standards by which to live, then there would be no infraction of His ways to incur punishment.

But that is not the case. God has clearly defined His laws and decrees, and we need the holy fear that He is Who He is! The key to *enjoying* long life rather than merely surviving X number of years lies in our obedience and trust in the One Who has established the way He wants His people to live.

- *"Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one"* (vv.3,4). Isn't it interesting that our Lord connects life going well for us with our reproduction of offspring? Recent statistics reported on the news were not only alarming but reflective of our society's race to destruction. In a comparison of family composition from the present with that of 1960, 32% of today's births in the US were to unwed mothers. In 1960 that figure stood at 5%. And grievously, 32% of babies conceived in the US are aborted. Can you grasp the dire consequences when a nation fails to follow our Lord's decrees and commands?

- *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up"* (vv.5-7). Do you want your children to learn to *love* the Lord their God? Then they must first understand Who He is to *you*, their most important link to Him.

That is why the contemporary lie of "quality time" that is measured in minutes can never replace the nurturing hours of intimate interaction spent over meals and in special time purposely set aside—especially during your Sabbath day of rest—for unhurried sharing. During those walks around the neighborhood or along a quiet path, parents and children can laugh and listen and reflect, activities that require focused attention with no distractions by cell phone or work responsibilities.

To *impress* commandments on your children is similar to the "impression" that is pressed in on your face when you lay against a wrinkled pillow for a length of time. That same "impression" is what is needed by your child—the pressing in of Godly values and

ways that is illustrated by real life examples from your own day-by-day decisions and encounters. It's not just what you say that reveals the living Lord to your family. It's the impact that He makes on all aspects of your daily choices that confirms or denies those words.

- *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).*

Do you see this, fathers? It is *your* responsibility to "educate" your children. Until the turn of this past century, the term "educate" was used to describe the personal nurturing relationship that a mother shared with her children. It had nothing to do with sending children off to school for academic training.

Nothing in Scripture gives parents permission to "outsource" their children to others to fulfill their responsibilities. ("Outsourcing" is a business term that refers to hiring others to produce a product with your name on it.) Parents who outsource their children are depending on others to teach what their children should know. However, the Bible calls for *parents* to instruct, train, and correct a child until the ways of God are the pattern of his or her life.

When our forefathers in the faith read, *"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it"* (Proverbs 22:6), they understood it to mean that parents must get to personally know the bent of each child. Then they could scripturally train their sons and daughters in the ways of the Lord that would enable them to live a life for God. For instance, a gentle-natured child might find greater fulfillment in volunteering at a nursing home than he or she might gain on the soccer field, even if the parents wished their child were more athletically inclined.

Because the Bible is the written record of God's commands and purposes, it bears witness to the responsibilities and privileges commanded of each of us:

- To live in a covenant love relationship with Him.
- To keep His commandments by the power of His Spirit.
- To fulfill His purposes with humility and peace.

Impudence: The Attitude of the Anti-Christ

To claim to be one of God's children and to go on in life without fulfilling His commands and purposes is *impudent* in our Lord's sight. This is serious. Some live in impudence by design, others out of ignorance.

Inherent in our sinful human nature, impudence is a product of our free will. Characterized by impertinence and presumption, impudence can often be recognized by attitudes and behavior that are stubborn, hardened, insulting, rude, or scoffing. Sometimes impudence is intrusive and pushy. At other times, though, it is more subtle, with disarming outward friendliness and agreement but inward snickering or self-righteousness. An impudent attitude denies deference and respect toward those entitled to it, or displays disdain for those who don't think the same way as that person does.

Scripture is full of examples of impudent, persistently negative attitudes and behaviors toward God, His commandments, or His purposes for His children. This helps to explain why, in the Older Testament, there are so many different Hebrew words for *fool*. Dr. Marvin Wilson has offered some insightful understanding of the varieties of fool in his classic, *Our Father Abraham*:

The **Simple Fool** (*peti*) is an ignorant or immature person who is vulnerable to error but still teachable. It is his *teachability* that makes him suitable discipleship material for those responsible for his training and development. His simplicity demonstrates his willingness to turn from error to wisdom and be changed, as each follower of Jesus has had to do. That is why you should welcome a *peti* who recognizes his need for correction and is willing to learn and to apply the wisdom that is shared with him.

Other types of fools, however, were rejected by our Hebraic forefathers as candidates for discipling and mentoring. In fact, Proverbs repeatedly warn the wise to avoid such individuals.

The **Hardened Fool** (*kesil, ewil*) is stubbornly set in his ways: “*As a dog returns to its vomit, so a kesil repeats his folly*” (Proverbs 26:11). He may appear to be listening avidly to your counsel and even promise to follow it. However, when you encounter him later, he admits he has not applied what you’ve shared with him. He’s still stuck in the same pit as before, and moaning just as fervently about his situation.

The *ewil* responds with insolence when you try to help him, and becomes angry when you confront him with his sin or error. The goal of biblical confrontation is to help a willing individual turn from his wayward path and turn toward the way that is pleasing to God. Trying to help an unwilling hardened fool will only wear you down! Your wasted efforts will also discourage you from being available as God’s instrument to help the truly teachable ones He sends your way.

The **Mocking Fool** (*letz*) is described in Proverbs 21:24: “*The proud and arrogant man—“Mocker” is his name; he behaves with overweening pride.*” This fool is convinced that he knows better than everyone else and makes sure others know that as well! By disrupting the discussions of righteous men and women and heckling people of wisdom, the mocking fool tries to intimidate them into silence or confusion. No wonder the apostle Paul admonishes followers of Jesus to *stand firm* in their walk of truth and avoid quarrelsome people!

Finally, the **God-denying Fool** (*nabal*) denies that God has any relevance to or influence in his life: “*The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’*” (Psalms 14:1). Not atheists, many “God-deniers” even claim to be “Christian.” However, they create a “god” of their own choosing to fit parameters they find personally acceptable and develop religious practices to meet their own tastes.

The God of the Bible strikes terror in their hearts; they can’t face Him and live by their own sinful choices so they exchange Him for a god of this world. Some even divide God into a discarded “Old Testament” deity of the Law and embrace instead a “New Testament” Lord who overlooks their sins. (Second century heretic Marcion perpetrated the same lie!)

All of the different manifestations of impudence can be traced back to one or more of the types of fool who were avoided by our Hebraic forefathers. Note the elements of impudence that resonate from fools:

- 1). A disregard for God, His Word, or for God-ordained authorities.
- 2). A deluded self-elevation above the people God has given to correct them.
- 3). A self-seeking, self-centered mindset that yields to no one.

Learning From Past Generations

The Impudence of Cain

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? [Why are you acting like a hardened fool?] Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it (Genesis 4:2-7).

We can assume that both Cain and Abel were aware of God's requirements for sacrificial offerings. Cain, however, not only refused to obey but then killed his righteous brother who wanted to please God. In the same vein, is it hard to imagine that in the near future, those who loudly claim the name "Christian" will be the persecutors of people who follow Jesus and keep His commands (see Revelation 12:17)?

The Unfaithful Wife

For countless generations God contended with the sin of impudence among the Israelites, the very ones He had chosen to bear witness to Himself as the one true God. Their repeated spiritual adultery brought His patience and forbearance to an end. Overrun and conquered by Assyrians and Babylonians, all Israel was plunged into captivity.

The impudence of the Israelites and its devastating consequences are recorded as a warning for us today:

"For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:1-4). Note that our spiritual forefathers — referred to in several passages as the wife of God! — had enjoyed His supernatural favor and protection, much as the Church has today.

"Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did" (vv. 5,6). Let's be real here. Just how seriously do you perceive the profound implications of what Paul is writing? How often do you visualize the congregations of this age — and note that Paul is speaking to us *collectively* as responsible for one another — as falling into the same trap as the Israelites long ago who had enjoyed God's very presence?

We do a great disservice to the tragic memory of the ones God had chosen to be His witnesses if we do not study their errors and then purpose to live in faithful obedience. Such a step demands intimacy and trust with the One Who has again issued a call for a Bride!

A People Set Apart

Some of the more obvious manifestations of stubborn, impudent, in-your-face sin might tempt us to disregard the inner heart issues that Jesus so eloquently expanded upon in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5-7). Don't be too quick to place yourself or your family members in the category of "surely these don't apply to us." Many a Christian couple have been dismayed to discover that their worship service-attending offspring are as readily active in the ways of the flesh as their "worldly" classmates are.

Recent statistics from pollster George Barna reveal that there is *no difference* in the rate of abortion among the churched and the unchurched. Just as telling, the rate of divorce among churchgoers is actually *higher* than among those who make no claims to a relationship with God.

Paul's warning for us today continues: "*Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: 'The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry'*" (1 Corinthians 10:7). Recent statistics point to over 60% of Americans (and 25% of children) as overweight. What is commonly referred to today as a "weakness" in overeating or excess alcohol consumption can lead to other sins. After all, God's chosen people perhaps could have exercised more self-control to resist pagan revelry had they not allowed themselves to become satiated with food and drink.

Carry this warning over to idolizing the Internet or television or fitness or sports — any consuming interest that robs you of earnest time spent seeking God's face alone and with your family. It's grievous to observe fellow followers of Jesus screaming hysterical-ly over a referee's error or getting hooked in secret on online porn.

Remember that old saying, "What you allow in moderation your children will excuse in excess." Now is the time to cinch your spiritual belt more tightly and shed the dross of worldly choices that keep your light from shining in the darkness.

At no time in history has our nation been so plunged into the decadence of lust as it is now. Obviously this temptation is not new, but in this generation immorality has become the norm rather than the unholy exception. This is why Paul could warn early believers, and us as well, to avoid compromise that could lead us to excuse sin: "*We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes*" (vv. 8,9). Jesus' words against adultery carry sexual immorality beyond the act to the evil intent of the heart. After all, it's not our eyes that cause us to sin but the tempting thoughts that tickle our will to pursue it.

But *testing our Lord* goes beyond fornication and adultery. Aren't we presuming on God's grace when we boast about His forgiveness and then blatantly choose to sin in our hearts through unresolved bitterness, rationalized slander, or covetous lust for "more and better" of the world's things? Do we honestly think that because we have been made holy — set aside for His use and purposes — our pursuit of what pleases the flesh will not *disqualify us from availability* to serve our Lord for His glory? The "venomous snakes" that threaten our spiritual lives today are slithering their way into our homes as acceptable practices and tolerated weaknesses. Be warned by the example of our forefathers that God will not be mocked!

Sometimes it's hard to make the leap of connecting outright sinful behavior with

inward complaining and grumbling. Yet both emanate from an ungrateful heart that denies our Father's sovereignty and right to purify us in areas that still reflect too much of the old creation. Paul admonishes the Corinthian believers, "*And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come*" (vv. 10,11).

God is very aware of your discomfort and areas of weakness. Prayer helps *you* to recognize that He alone can bring you peace and power as He accompanies you through your valley of temptation and trial. Turn the temptation to grumble into a heartfelt trusting cry to your Lord so that impudence will not worm its way into your response to difficult circumstances.

More Lessons from Israelite Impudence

Israel was God's beloved. She was also woefully marred in His sight: disobedient, obstinate, hardened, and stubborn. We can learn much from examining each of these characteristics in order to avoid those snares.

"*Woe to the obstinate children," declares the Lord, "to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh's protection, to Egypt's shade for refuge*" (Isaiah 30:1,2). As you look around at today's marvelously adorned temples of worship decked out with the latest technology of sight and sound so that the eager masses can worship in air-conditioned ease, do you sense that God is pleased? Has "*Egypt's shade for refuge*" been translated into an expectation of the creature comforts to which we are so accustomed in our homes, our schools, our workplaces? Has the Body in America come to the conclusion that THIS is an acceptable substitute for *obedient loving trust* in our Lord and *committed relational responsibility* for our spiritual family?

Tragically, the essence of obstinate hearts and minds is an inflexible persistence in ways that appeal to modern marketing but have little in common with the sacrificial self-denial that so caught the attention of first-century society. By God's grace and power, the remnant who *are* living out His truths in such a way that their co-workers and neighbors and extended families are being impacted are quietly and unobtrusively bringing many into our Lord's sheepfold. But the glitzy conferences that dangle "signs and wonders" as door prizes for attendees edify nobody but the guests themselves — and the ones on stage who are puffed up with the praise that belongs to God alone.

Consider this: The ways of Egypt that have elevated the US stock market to dizzying heights through presumption on the future and greedy desire for gain without labor have now infiltrated congregations. Do any of these modern-day scenarios mirror the relational power that Jesus envisioned for His followers to bring sinners to repentance at His Cross?

- "Seeker-sensitive" services that offer warm, fuzzy grace and forgiveness *without repentance* (a bill of goods that will crumble before the Throne of righteousness).

- Corporation-style congregations that offer "something for everyone" affinity groups to keep parishioners involved but offer little motivation to impact the lost.

- Ever-expanding congregations that have paid staffs larger than some corporations so that things will run smoothly. Sadly, they have missed the key element of *accountable intimacy* between mentor and disciple: two brothers or two sisters who are helping each other to trust Jesus more in deed as well as in word.

- Desperate, overworked small-town preachers with families yearning for their too-busy husband and Dad, sinking into a mire of despair. They just can't measure up to pastors who appear more successful in turning the lost away from destruction and building edifices filled with happy worshipers. And no wonder they are frustrated to the point of so many diving headlong into the "comfort" of adultery: They are trying to fulfill a job description that was issued to *true biblical elders*: older, wiser men who had raised their families well and were prepared and available to commit to raising up strong followers of Jesus to reach others!

"But the house of Israel is not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for the whole house of Israel is hardened and obstinate" (Ezekiel 3:7). Hardened hearts insist on their own way. They resist change even if confronted by God through one of His servants or through conviction from His Word. Because this culture has become so accustomed to resisting God-given authority, each person chooses to do what seems right in his or her own eyes. No matter how the decisions turn out, the Lord receives no glory because He wasn't involved in the first place.

It is apparent from this passage that as the leadership goes, so go the people. *"Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord his God and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the Lord. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him take an oath in God's name. He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the Lord, the God of Israel.*

*Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the Lord, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy" (2 Chronicles 36:11-16). The classic call for repentance in II Chronicles 7:14 has to start with the *people of God* humbling themselves and turning from their own wicked ways!*

Note that this passage begins with the influence of a stubborn, ungodly young king who refuses to listen either to spiritual leadership (Jeremiah) or to governmental authority (Nebuchadnezzar). His impudence, rebellion and pride sets the stage for spiritual authorities as well as the people at large to resist righteousness and rebel against God. Theologian Francis Schaeffer prophesied decades ago that there would come a time in this nation that unholiness would be tolerated and accepted if individuals felt they had their own personal peace and affluence. Righteousness would become a nonissue. His words are being fulfilled.

The "*detestable practices of the nations*" have infiltrated houses of worship as well as homes. Prophetic words of warning are either disregarded or not delivered. At the retreat center at which we served for nearly eleven years, Mike asked a group of evangelical

pastors if they ever altered their sermons so as not to offend their congregations, the source of their livelihood. Each and every man admitted to this. If the shepherds are fearful, the sheep are not likely to walk in spiritual power or integrity either.

Worldly infiltration that desecrates the coming together of God's people is evident in today's "worship music" that produces a soulful high among the worshipers, or imitates a rock concert or nightclub performance. We've talked with men who admit their greatest temptation to lust comes during worship when an attractive young woman embracing a microphone croons in a seductive manner. The "temple of the Lord" is once again being defiled — not the building but the men and women who are claiming to serve God!

Methods of evangelism that are designed to appeal to the flesh are never going to produce spiritual fruit that lasts. That is why services that offer "friendly" messages never bring sinners to *conviction and repentance*—the only entry into God's Kingdom as the "old man" is put off and the robe of Jesus's righteousness donned in His Spirit.

The "*unfaithfulness*" of churchgoers who resist the words of warning from God's Word increases more and more, just as the Chronicles passage related. How many "Christian" parents allow their daughters to dress in styles that invite lust or even attack because they don't want their children to be considered outcasts among their peers? We've talked with mothers who encourage their children to date so that they will learn social graces. Intentionally or not, they are pushing their children into situations that are inviting consequences the kids are not mature enough to handle. Nor are the string of broken relationships so common among teens in the world a biblical preparation for marriage. Young people who experience repeated failed relationships are learning how to get divorced, or in biblical terminology, how to *break covenant*.

During Zedekiah's reign of unrighteousness, there came a time when "*there was no remedy.*" Those who ignore God's warnings are inviting peril. At what time does God's patience end and there is no remedy for the impudent? Two passages in particular should send shivers up the spine of a Jesus follower on behalf of those who refuse to take God at His Word:

"Then the Lord said to me: 'Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!' (Jeremiah 15:1); and, 'The word of the LORD came to me: 'Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, even if these three men — Noah, Daniel and Job — were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign LORD'" (Ezekiel 14:12-14).

The unfaithfulness of those who had been chosen and loved by God had brought devastating chastisement — yet still they refused to repent. Each of the righteous men named by God had suffered greatly for his enduring faithfulness to Him. Yet we are told that even if they were to try to plea for their people's cause, they would go unanswered. What a tragic state of affairs!

The *national* aspect of these two passages stands out markedly. There is a certain collective responsibility that each of these five men felt keenly during their lives of serving their Lord. We who are indwelt with His Spirit should be mourning and wailing even as the prophet Jeremiah admonished, for surely the collective sins of the nation as well as the congregations are grievous to our God:

“O my people, put on sackcloth and roll in ashes; mourn with bitter wailing as for an only son, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us. ‘I have made you a tester of metals and my people the ore, that you may observe and test their ways. They are all hardened rebels, going about to slander. They are bronze and iron; they all act corruptly. The bellows blow fiercely to burn away the lead with fire, but the refining goes on in vain; the wicked are not purged out. They are called rejected silver, because the Lord has rejected them” (Jeremiah 6:26-30).

In spite of desperate trials and suffering, the people were not moved to repent nor were the wicked purged from among their midst. Isn't this the situation that families and faith communities face today? Many parents in recent decades have sought to be *friends* with their children. In so doing, they have failed to carry out their biblical responsibilities to correct impudent behavior and instill righteous attitudes and responses that conform to the ways of God.

To give in to sin is to invite its repetition. Observe the younger generations in the United States. Are the children in our congregations any less impudent than the children of the unchurched? If God were to send Jeremiah to us today, might his warning be:

“Parents, you do not teach your children my ways. You indulge the impudence of your children by becoming their friends rather than fulfilling your responsibility to me as their parents. You have raised a generation of hardened, mocking, and God-denying fools. The church, likewise, fails to correct the unrepentant, and treats the unrighteous among them as one of the righteous.” Think about this.

Evil Inclinations Stem from Impudent Hearts

Why is it so hard for us to fulfill our responsibility to correct the impudent? The anti-Christ spirit has deceived many who claim to be “Christians” into believing that they really “aren't bad.” In fact, they even rationalize that most people are basically good. The influence of psychology on the western churches has convinced many that a poor environment or painful upbringing causes individuals to break the law. In a sense, lawbreakers are actually “victims” who have made “wrong choices”, to use current terminology.

The Bible is very clear, however, as to the source of rebellious impudence: *“But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him ‘unclean’”* (Matthew 15:18-20). As Jesus stresses, your words as well as your deeds reflect your heart condition.

And not only adults are subject to sinful choices. Evil inclinations begin early in life. Place one toy between two small children and see if one graciously offers it to the other to play with first! *“The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.... Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclina-*

tion of his heart is evil from childhood..." (Genesis 6:5; 8:20,21).

Your thought life initiates your response to temptation. Do you take your thoughts captive and make them obedient in Christ as Paul has directed in II Corinthians 10:5? If you allow tempting thoughts to linger, your emotions toward them will be aroused and you'll take action that could become habitual. *"When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death"* (James 1:13-15). Dire consequences await the person who allows sin to grow to maturity in his life as a pattern of unrighteousness.

Recognizing that each individual is responsible for his or her sinful choices and even the desire to sin is the beginning of the wisdom that can confront impudence.

A Destructive Partnership: Impudence and Grumbling

How gracious of the psalmist to encourage God's people in their position as His beloved, but then to warn them of their *daily* responsibility to choose either obedient trust or hardened rebellion: *"Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did"* (Psalms 95:6-9).

What happened at Meribah? Why did their forefathers harden themselves against the One Who had shown them such love? In view of all the miraculous deliverances God had performed on behalf of the Israelites, they still grumbled when faced with testing. But this is a persistent pattern of those who live impudently toward God. Despite His wonderful mercies, they grumble when things don't go their way.

A story is told of a man who went to a house one evening and rang the door bell. When the owner of the house opened the door he gave the owner \$100. This occurred every evening at 6:00 o'clock for 30 days. On the 31st day the man failed to show up. After waiting a few minutes, the owner of the house opened the front door only to see his neighbor next door receiving \$100. The homeowner was furious! Why was his neighbor receiving *his* \$100? Isn't this the way many respond to God's grace—with ungrateful impudence? The arrogant expectation of impudence demands, "Somebody owes me." Conversely, humility whispers, "I am unworthy of God's mercy and kindness."

Aware of the destructive power of impudence, Paul warns God's people against its sources. Ignorance of God's ways and power comes from a hardened heart that really doesn't want to know how to follow Jesus in obedient trust: *"So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts"* (Ephesians 4:17,18).

Every person on earth lives in the futile thinking of darkness until he or she trusts in the shed blood of the Messiah. Without that transformation, we are "Gentiles" who live in impudence.

James also warns us against the seductive ways of darkness that draw believers into spiritual adultery: *"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world*

is hatred toward God? *Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God*" (James 4:4). These are strong words. The "ways of the world" are at enmity with the "ways of God." The choice is yours. The two cannot coexist. You must forsake the ways of the world and turn toward God's pattern of life if you truly want to follow Jesus.

Because of the overriding impudence among churchgoers today, you may be among those who find it hard to believe that these warnings apply. A prevailing mindset hints that we are more faithful than the people of the past. But our Lord knew that the veil of deceit would be heavy over people today:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Note that the sins listed emanate from hearts that have no consideration for anyone else. Yet these very same people are religious in *practice* but have no connection with the power of the Spirit to walk in godliness. Are there indicators to let you know that you've given in to an impudent attitude? Like nerve endings that warn you when your hand is about to hold something hot, there are ways to detect impudence.

No Rest or Peace for the Impudent Heart

The impudence of the Israelites is a platform that reveal not only the root of impudence but also the fruit it produces:

So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me [acted impudently] and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God... Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith (Hebrews 3:7-12; 4:1,2).

Is God still speaking to His people today? Through His Spirit we are able to perceive His intervention in our lives just as the Israelites experienced forty years of answers. But impudence is connected with *rebellion*, the very character of Satan. The rebellious person insists on his own way and, in effect, makes himself "like God." He resists the grace and mercy that God pours his way and opts for personal demands. In their impudence,

the rebellious have failed to learn or to appreciate the “ways” of God.

How can you keep from developing an unbelieving heart? Draw closer to the Keeper of your soul: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you [the way of living for our Father] and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). As we submit to our Lord’s ways and commands, we are able to perceive the lessons in the particular classroom in which He has us. Choosing to walk in obedient trust brings rest to your soul — your mind, will and emotions — even in the midst of wearying trials.

Unbelief brings worry. Ask yourself: Am I a habitual worrier? Do I have doubts that God will meet my need this time? If you answered yes, you are impudently stepping all over God’s character as your Provider.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear... Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow...If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (Matthew 6:25-34).

Count up the number of admonitions to NOT WORRY. Don’t insult the One who loves and cares for you by entertaining anxious thoughts!

The Lord of the Sabbath Rest

The unbelief that results in worry can consume you with unrest. Your obedient trust in the Lord *is* the Sabbath rest for your soul spoken about in the Book of Hebrews:

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with trust...There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience (Hebrews 4:1,2,9-11).

If your relationship with God is not characterized by obedient trust, you will have no desire to know or to keep His commands. Jesus explained the difference between those who keep God’s commandments and those who don’t:

Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly,

'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash (Matthew 7:22-27).

Response to the direction the Spirit gives you signifies a living relationship with Jesus. But presuming to jump in and represent God's power by demonic strength brings no glory to God when He has not commanded you in your action. Jesus knows those who *hear His voice and respond to Him*. To perform mighty works in His name without the impulse of His Spirit is counterfeit power. To know what He is commanding you to do and to ignore it is just as deadly. Rest in Jesus comes from seeking Him, following Him, and trusting Him.

Since World War II, however, "counseling" has become the method of choice for people seeking rest for their souls. A tremendous amount of ministry today is conducted through psychological counseling. Often people who turn to counselors have no rest and are plagued by worry, guilt and fear.

Sadly, many counselors urge the individual to explore their past in order to discover who was to blame for their present distress. We have found that undue focus on the past fans flames of bitterness and unforgiveness but does nothing to bring the individual to the point of seeking forgiveness for the sinful attitudes to which they have clung. You are not responsible for what has been done to you, but you *are* responsible for your response to those actions!

Much of the church has moved away from the biblical imperative to encourage and/or to rebuke in order to return a believer to obedient trust in our Lord and on the promises in His Word. As a proven mentor, Paul reminds Timothy of the centrality of the Word of God and the most effective method of using it to help people grow in Jesus: "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2).

Paul also foresaw the unopposed impudence of our day when he further warned his protégé, "*For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers [counselors] to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths"* (vv. 3,4). The "sound doctrine" to which Paul refers is the Gospel and commands of God as represented in the Old Testament, the only scripture at that time. A current "myth" to be wary of is the "God wants me to be happy" concept that denies our need to endure refining fires if we are to share in Jesus's glory.

We are living in lawless days in which the teachings of God are ignored, or denigrated as "legalism". This is why Jesus so adamantly warns His followers to keep alert against deceptive practices and instruction that are presented as coming from God:

"Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness [the man who is opposed to keeping God's commands] is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt him-

self over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.” A counterfeit system of religious practice will be established that appears godly but will in reality be God-denying. This insidious system will embody what pleases people, not God.

“For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work.” Through spirits of Hellenistic philosophy and Roman organization, demonic power has introduced lawless religious practices and concepts into churches today. *“But the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way...The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved”* (2 Thessalonians 2:3,4,7,9,10). People will rush to conferences which guarantee signs and wonders but refuse to obey God, claiming that His grace precludes loving obedience. Jesus’s words, *“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign!”* (Matthew 12:39), are mirrored by churchgoers who seek mighty manifestations rather than the Master.

Some of God’s people are so impudent that *“God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie”* (v. 11). How can people become so deluded that they can’t separate lies from truth? By ignoring the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, that reveals the heart and mind of God.

Knowing the I AM

The Name of Nearness

Years ago when one of our friends put his trust in Jesus, the Lord told him, “I want you to *know me.*” Our friend made a note of this and put it in his Bible. For two years he read all kinds of books, getting to know all *about God.* Yet, he felt no closer to Him. Then one day that little note fell out of his Bible. Reading those words from two years earlier, he became convicted. He had spent two years getting to know *all about* the Lord, rather than approaching the Lord to get to *know Him.*

You need to know God. The God you will get to know isn’t the God you were *taught about.* You don’t get to know Him by what others tell you about Him. The true God has to be known through your own personal experience. *“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”* (John 17:3).

Paul’s encounter with his Lord resulted in a ministry that he knew would require spiritual power and fortitude to carry out. A Jew preaching that the Jewish Messiah had come would not likely find receptivity among either Jews or Gentiles. So Paul went aside to be with the Lord: *“But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus”* (Galatians 1:15-17). The solitude of time spent alone in the desert hearing from the Spirit strengthened the apostle to walk in obedient trust.

Many of God’s people today are following the same rebellious path as did our spiritual ancestors. Think of the number of “Christian” activities that have nothing to do with obeying or pleasing God. In our impudence, we plan and establish activities and goals

“for the Kingdom”, then ask God to bless them. Because of our failure to seek Him and know Him as He has revealed Himself in His Word, we set up our own concepts of what He should be like. A spirit of delusion sent by God Himself causes people to create a ‘god’ who is manageable, a deity just a little larger than they are, who excuses them in their disobedience.

God, however, has summed Himself up as **I AM**. It is **I AM** Who revealed Himself to Abraham, the father of all who put their trust in Jesus: “After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. **I AM** your shield, your very great reward...When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “**I AM** God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless” (Genesis 15:1; 17:1).

To Moses, the friend of the Lord, God reiterated His name: “Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “**I AM Who I AM**. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘**I AM** has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:13,14).

To both the prophets and the people, His name was revealed to bring strength and confidence in His sustaining power: “So do not fear, for **I AM** with you; do not be dismayed, for **I AM** your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand...This is what the Lord says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: **I AM** the first and **I AM** the last; apart from me there is no God” (Isaiah 41:10; 44:6).

A final example of the nearness of God to all who trust Him: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely **I AM** with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19,20).

Always aware of His people’s need to picture His words, Jesus employed many metaphors. Notice how many of these metaphors demonstrated His identification with the name of His Father!

- “**I AM** the bread of life” (John 6:48).
- “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “**I AM** the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).
- “Jesus said to her, “**I AM** the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25,26).
- “Jesus answered, “**I AM** the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).
- “Don’t you believe that **I AM** in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that **I AM** in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves” (John 14:10,11).
- “**I AM** the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. **I AM** the vine;

you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:1-5).

To be attached to the **I AM** as a branch on the vine requires a *union* to exist. To be in *union* with someone is to be joined to him and to share the characteristics of the one with whom you are in *union*. Our union with our Lord becomes stronger as we grow in our knowledge of Him, keep His commandments, and fulfill His purposes. Note this: Impudence *cannot live in union* with our Lord.

Union with our Lord brings a relational witness that reflects our *knowing* Him. For example, Jesus fully knew His Father and was fully known by Him. Therefore He could speak as He did as a credible witness to Nicodemus: *“I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony”* (John 3:11).

When John and Peter were warned by the religious leaders to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, they replied, *“For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard”* (Acts 4:20). These men were intimately acquainted with their Master and could bear forceful witness to His words and deeds. In his later years, John again emphasized this same witness to the One he knew: *“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ”* (1 John 1:3).

When you speak about someone you know intimately and have experienced personally, your phraseology about that person is entirely different than that of someone who hasn’t met your friend. Your descriptions contain personal observations, shared experiences, and words filled with relational warmth. Without personal interconnectedness, you can only convey facts about someone else.

A Walk of Union With the I AM

What is the purpose of our union with the Lord? The Bible bears witness to at least three reasons worth repeating:

- To live in a covenant love relationship with Him.
- To keep His commandments.
- To fulfill His purposes.

How love and obedience are interwoven in our union with God is eloquently presented by the apostle John: *“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did”* (1 John 2:3-6). Union with Jesus is reflected by our walk with Jesus — bearing the cross to gain the glory.

The treasure of union with God overflows with gems of relational intimacy from our Father to His adopted children.

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him...Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him (1 John 3:1,3-6).

No one who lives in lawlessness knows God. People with impure hearts may practice the visible elements of Christianity, but there is no testimony of a viable relationship with our Lord. The “relationship” is one way: the lawless *claim* to know God, but no evidence of the Spirit’s work is present in their lives.

Our confidence in our Father’s holding power is bolstered by His very presence in us! And if God’s Spirit dwells in us, there is no room for fear.

If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love (1 John 4:15-18).

The love produced in our union with God is far more than emotion. It is an eager obedient enactment of walking in His power according to the commands He has given. If you are fearful and anxious, confess these sins to your Sinbearer. Turn away from them and turn toward Him for forgiveness and the power to love as He has commanded you to! “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:1-4).

How does God affirm the union with His children? He answers their prayers! If you are in union with God, your will lines up with His will so that you want whatever He wants for you. As you take captive your thoughts to align them with those of Jesus and walk as He walks, your answered prayers will testify to God’s faithfulness to His own. “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:13-15).

Peter, as well, affirms our Father’s response to the call of His faithful: “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12). How vital to make sure that your prayers are not “bouncing off the ceiling!” Examine your heart first, so that your spirit is assured that your praise and petitions are reaching their destination.

Parents: *God's Instruments to Remove Impudence*

Knowing Your Children

Several years ago a young man who was struggling asked me (Mike) for help. After some time I met his parents and, in the course of conversation, was describing to them some disturbing personality qualities I had observed in him. His mother nodded her head in tears, acknowledging that I was describing the son she knew. His father, however, had a blank expression. Finally he blurted out, "I've never seen in my son any of the things you're talking about." This man had never taken the time to really know his son. He had failed both in his parental authority and in his responsibility to train his child.

Our Lord is not a God of chaos and disorder. He has given authority as a means of maintaining peace. The Bible stipulates that men are to exercise authority in their homes in the same loving manner that Jesus enacts His headship over His called-out ones: "*For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior*" (Ephesians 5:23).

A man renders account to God for his humble exercise of authority. God-given authority encompasses the responsibility to *include* and *exclude*, to *commend* and to *correct*. By his authority, a husband/father renders account to God for the peace in his home. It is his responsibility to keep out those people or things that rob a home of peace, and to welcome those people or things that contribute to peace. In this way he is fulfilling the command given in Ephesians 6:4: "***Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.***" Within his home, he needs to commend those biblical attitudes and behaviors that contribute to peace and correct those things that rob the home of peace.

Followers of Jesus are responsible to establish *halakhahs*, the biblical applications of God's Word to the way you live. One way to share ongoing instruction with your children is to sit down with them and determine family *halakhahs*. It's not enough to be able to quote scriptures to your children if you don't help them to figure out how to apply God's Word to the situations they encounter. By putting action to the words and establishing biblical precedent for the decisions and choices you make as a family, you're training both your children and yourself to walk in obedient trust. [See our book *Christian Halakhahs* for more insights on *halakhahs*.]

The Lord Dwells with His People

As our forefathers in the faith recognized, the **I AM** loves to be among His people. That is, He loves to actively live in union with them. This includes being in their homes through His Spirit. God commanded the Israelites, "*As part of your equipment have something to dig with, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover up your excrement. For the Lord your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you. Your camp must be holy, so that he will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you*" (Deuteronomy 23:13,14). Consider the name given to the Christ child: "*Immanuel—which means, 'God with us'*" (Matthew 1:23b).

Peace in the home, that is, the *shalom bayit* of wholeness, harmony, and well-being of each person living there, is the foundation for the loving warmth needed to nurture individuals and families in the way of our Lord.

When Jesus sent His disciples out, He gave them an indicator for locating a home in which they could stay. That sign was *peace*: “*When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house*” (Luke 10:5-7). A man who knows how to promote peace in his home is carrying out his responsibilities to God. A man who fails to value the wholeness and harmony that only God’s peace affords will live in the midst of disorder and confusion. The peace of God will be noticeably absent from his life, his family, and his home.

Men! The Christlike use of your authority as His humble servant to bring peace in your home is THE PRIME DIRECTIVE. Failure to do this has severe consequences for your marriage and your children. You can’t “outsource” this responsibility to clergy, youth directors, Sunday schools, or to any other person or religious program.

Helping Your Child to Walk Righteously

God is not short on revealing the kind of life that pleases Him. Parents are doubly responsible before the Lord to walk uprightly themselves and to train their children to walk in righteousness. Below are a comparison of traits which describe various qualities. *Human Characteristics* are those with which you were born; they are part of your human nature. *Biblical Characteristics* need to be instilled in a child through diligent and loving training, and in an adult through committed loadbearing relationships.

These traits promote personal peace and relational harmony, and are what the Bible calls the “Path of Righteousness”. Human Characteristics are the source of personal anxiety and interpersonal tension, and are the “Path of Impudence”.

Measure yourself by circling the number which best identifies your character traits. Then ask your spouse or close friend to evaluate your responses for accuracy. The results are not designed to condemn you but to identify which areas the Spirit wants to work change in you. Remember, “**Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid**” (Proverbs 12:1). Be teachable!

<u>Biblical Characteristics</u>	< versus >											<u>Human Characteristics</u>
Open-handed	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Tight-fisted
Joyful	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Depressed
Yielding	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Defiant
Accessible	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Aloof
Zealous	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Lazy
Courageous	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Fearful
Forgiving	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Bitter
Caring	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Selfish
Honest	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Deceptive
Confident	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Worried
Longsuffering	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Irritable
Trusting	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Cynical
Chaste	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Sensual

Thankful	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Grumbling
Organized	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Sloppy
Merciful	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Indifferent
Fair	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Biased
Humble	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Proud
Gentle	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Harsh
Submissive	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Bossy
Hospitable	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Isolated
Frugal	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Wasteful
Prompt	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Late

Jesus confronted the religious leaders of His day because of their failure to know God's Word and to understand His power to accomplish that will: *"Jesus replied, 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God'"* (Matthew 22:29). The Bible says of itself, *"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). If we are to be people of integrity who trust in our Lord as did Abraham, we must search His Word diligently to apply it effectively in His power. It is through the written record of His commands and purposes for each of us that we can then pass on a heritage that will bring Him praise.