

July 12, 2010

Our Faith Calls For Obedience To ALL God's Commands

James makes clear, *faith-in-action* evidences authentic trust in our Lord: **"Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead"** (James 2:18,26). The apostle offers this warning with the loving concern we are voicing as well: If yours is a "dead faith," what will that mean for you at the Judgment Throne?

You may have been raised in a religious system that was formed in the womb of Hellenism. If you're wondering why that's important to know, consider this: Hellenism emphasizes passivity and spiritual lethargy — people put their "faith" in what they have an intellectual grasp of. "Knowing God's Word" echoes the practice of the religious Pharisees who were exceedingly well-versed in the text. In fact, they believed that the text itself would bring to them eternal life even though they denied the Word Incarnate right in front of them (John 5:39,40). Bringing His Word to *application* out of grateful love for our Lord is what we followers of Jesus are called to do by Him and empowered by His indwelling Spirit to obey (John 14:15). This is the life which pleases our God and witnesses to our faith.

"...to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all"
(Romans 4:16)

We have to admit, until we went to Israel and received insight into the Hebraic foundations of obedient trust, we had no understanding of what it meant that Abraham was our spiritual father. Years later, as we've made what our Father is restoring our way of life, Abraham's fatherhood has guided our desire to live by that kind of trust — an obedience evidenced by a man who was even willing to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac at God's command. The eternal Covenant promised to the patriarch by God (see Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:14-16) was fulfilled through Jesus' death and resurrection. Our Lord made possible the new Covenant ratified in His blood that we who live in union with our Father are also counted as children of Abraham. (Paul discusses this relationship at length in Romans chapters 9-11. If you haven't read this lately, you might want to spend some time pondering its implications for your life.)

Our father Abraham's relationship with God was so important to His purposes that the Gospel, the Good News of reconciliation with God through trust, was first preached to Abraham (Galatians 3:6-9). And, when our Father told the two of us to call what He was restoring "The *Hebraic* Restoration," He was taking us back to the obedient trust relationship with Himself enjoyed by the first Hebrew recorded in the Bible, Abraham (Genesis 14:13).

Because of this spiritual connection to Abraham, we who follow Jesus as Lord of our life must reveal our own faith through our responsive actions. Our actions earn us nothing

from God, but only verify that we live trusting in Him and doing His will (see Matthew 7:21, 12:50, 25:31-46). There's an undeniable connection between Abraham and the faith-in-action that's essential for all our Father's children, as set forth by the apostle James:

"Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham trusted God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone" (James 2:21-24).

Both Luke and Paul understood and made as an indispensable part of their instruction to Jesus-followers that a person must prove their repentance by their changed life and actions: ***"I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds"*** (Acts 26:20; see also Luke 3:8).

We've mentioned previously the approximately 1,050 commands in the Newer Testament, commands which by His grace at work in us empowers us to obey for His good pleasure (Hebrews 13:21). God's commands are both for our good as well as living testimony of the difference between the sacred and the profane, between living by our sin nature and living according to His Spirit and His Word. (See Ezekiel 44:23 for the principle which we as priests of our Father should abide in ourselves as we disciple others.) So, have you earnestly pursued following His commands by putting them into practice as your way of life, thereby authenticating your faith as genuine? Ignorance of His commands doesn't make you innocent in His sight. Nor does a willful stubbornness that chooses particular commands to obey and others to ignore...

Please, prayerfully weigh your lifestyle choices and compare them to His Word. The trust manifested by our father Abraham was evidenced by obedience. Is yours?

The Disappointment of Fruitless Ministry

Have you ever ministered to someone over a period of time and found that it ends in seeming fruitlessness? We've periodically found ourselves in this situation, and it's painful. When your love and guidance ultimately seem to have fallen on deaf ears, you find yourself asking, What else could I have done? Have I not rightly heard from God?

We'd like to share an insight we've gleaned over the years that may help your ability to minister to others more effectively. Every person we came alongside to help who in the end walked away disregarding the counsel Father had given us for them was *imprisoned*. They were held captive by an underlying stronghold of *begrudging bitterness* they refused to repent of and demolish. (1John 2:9, 11.)

Castles are generally constructed with strong outer walls of protection to impede the enemy from reaching the main fortress. Like the surrounding walls of a castle, spiritual strongholds protect the unclean spirit of **begudging bitterness**. The demons know that as long as someone holds on to the unforgiveness of bitterness in any form, they'll never be forgiven by our heavenly Father (Matthew 6:15).

You've probably found, as we have, that you may spend considerable time helping someone deal with fear, rejection, religiosity, or any of the other outer walls. But, when you come to the main fortress, which is almost always **begudging bitterness**, the resistance shows up in ways it hadn't manifested before.

Since you've cared enough to invest time, emotional energy and even yourself as Father's instrument of service, you may find yourself fighting off the temptation to resent because you feel like you've been used and discarded. Actually, you *have* been used; and the demons made sure you were defiled by that person's bitterness too (Hebrews 12:15) so that you might be discouraged from helping other people. Entertaining even a root fragment of bitterness, however, is *not* Father's plan for you (Ephesians 4:31,32). If you give way to resentment, the demons end up with a double victory—a foothold in you as well as a reinforced stronghold in the person you were coming alongside to help! (See Ephesians 4:26,27.)

There is a particular indicator that often predicts a sadly inevitable negative outcome: If throughout the process of helping someone you find yourself in the position of **persuading them to accept the truths you're sharing**, you're eventually going to face a dead end.

On the other hand, if they **readily hear the wisdom of your words through the Spirit of Christ and put them into practice**, you can have hope of a positive outcome. People who desire for their character to be conformed more and more to that of Jesus don't need convincing. (See Ephesians 4:22-24.) However, those who want to hold onto the familiarity of their demonic darkness will resist your biblical counsel for change (1John 1:5,6).

Paul offers a rather startling command to the Jesus followers in Corinth when they were confronted with someone in their midst who preferred to hold onto their sin rather than repent: *turn him over to Satan* so that his sin nature may be destroyed and his spirit ultimately be saved (1Corinthians 5:5; see also 1Timothy 1:20). Satan is a master at chewing on the sin nature and making life miserable so that a person will cry out in repentance to our Father. Isn't that more loving than tolerating or excusing their sin and allowing their bitterness to defile others in your faith family?

While you may be tempted to ease their discomfort at this time, don't offer a counterfeit acceptance when they're not in fellowship with our Father and Lord Jesus. (See Ephesians 4:17-19.) They've chosen to walk in the darkness of bitterness and spurn His light for the time being. Allow sin to become utterly sinful and detestable to them so they'll be humbled and contrite before our Father! Turning the unrepentant over to Satan is a severe mercy God offers them when they've resisted all human help.

Wanting to help each of you to be fruitful in the Kingdom,
Mike & Sue