

“Put on Love, Which Binds Them All Together in Perfect Unity”

(Colossians 3:14)

It's happening now!

Our heavenly Father has once again (in 1948) returned the Jewish people to the land He promised the Patriarchs and given them back (in 1967) the city He loves, Jerusalem. These fulfilled prophetic promises are banners announcing that He is restoring to Gentiles around the world an understanding of His Word that is far different than anti-Semitic theology has disseminated over the centuries. During the past several decades Father has been restoring a Hebraic understanding of the Bible to undo the labors of centuries of anti-Semitic theologians — those who hate everything Jewish. Specifically, these theologians have tried to eradicate the **collective and cooperative nature** in which the Newer Testament commands are given. This article will focus on the vital importance of mutual participation in the four most common collective endeavors in Christianity: •**marriage**, •**faith community**, •**ministry** and •**business**.

These four cooperative ventures have similar elements which can contribute to our heavenly Father blessing them. **Or** if these elements are absent, divorce, dissolution or failure results. Since the time period following World War II, too many of these four relational endeavors have experienced a high degree of failure, especially in the US. Several historic causes as well as current factors have found Christianity overflowing with the carcasses of multitudes of unsuccessful endeavors. And because of the failure of so many Christian marriages, faith communities, ministries and businesses, the reputation of our Lord Jesus has been maligned as being unreliable, untrustworthy, and bereft of power and authority.

The Negative Effects Of Centuries Of Anti-Semitic Theology

The first to follow our Lord Jesus were **Hebraic** in their understanding of the interconnectedness of their lives. Acknowledging Abraham, the first Hebrew, as their common spiritual ancestor, they identified with every other Hebrew who emanated from his line — as did Jesus who was of the tribe of Judah. As Hebrews, these first followers viewed their lives as a lifelong journey, a mutual pilgrimage of the *genuinely* born again which culminated when they heard their names declared aloud to the hosts of heaven (Revelation 3:5). En route to their eternal reward, Jesus alone was their Head and High Priest (see Hebrews 4:14) guiding and empowering them by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Determined to live out this journey **together** for Father's glory, they willingly **sacrificed their own will and desires to serve as slave/servants (*doulos*) of Jesus** in fulfilling His Father's will.

Sadly, the end of the 2nd century found Hellenism's infiltration of Christianity taking root. Gentile (non-Jewish) leaders replaced the earlier Hebrew leaders. Anti-Semitic theologians arose and eliminated the Hebraic understanding of what our Lord Jesus came to accomplish through the New Covenant. In particular, the Bible's emphasis on **mutual, cooperative applications of Scriptural commands** was eliminated by these theologians. By the time the biblical text was translated into English, the plural, collective sense as well as the ongoing, keep doing it tense of many of our Lord's 1,050 commands in the Newer Testament were lost. For example, the admonition to “*continue*

to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12) is communal: “You (plural) work out your salvation (plural) together.” The process to the goal is clear: “Together, help each other get through the narrow gate.”

An example of the continuing verb tense which translators have eliminated is demonstrated in the oft quoted Romans 10:9,10: “*If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*” This translation misses the ongoing nature that’s present in many of Father’s commands and makes it sound like a one-time action. But the Hebraic understanding, as our Lord’s first followers would readily recognize, is this:

“If you acknowledge publicly with your mouth that Jesus is LORD and trust in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be delivered. For with the heart one goes on trusting and thus continues toward righteousness, while with the mouth one keeps on making public acknowledgement and thus continues toward deliverance” (Romans 10:9,10 CJB).

You can’t miss the deliberate “keep pressing on” aspect of Paul’s admonition about the Lordship of Jesus in His follower’s lives: we “*go on trusting*” and “*keep on making public acknowledgement*” of Jesus as LORD of our life. This LORDSHIP of Jesus is a daily, intentional yieldedness to HIS will and purposes rather than our own. This means that Jesus has all power and authority to rule your life!

Suffering The Negative Effects Of Inadequate Mutual Preparation

Those who first followed our Lord Jesus had a strong sense of **communal self-awareness** on their way to their salvation. They viewed themselves collectively as a people set apart by God and called out from the goals and values of the world. Being “called-out” is the true meaning of *ekklesia* – the collective called-out ones of Jesus. Yet anti-Semitic theologians and Bible translators have wrongfully translated *ekklesia* as “church” – inferring “church” to be a building in which to worship rather than the people whom Jesus has called out to be separate for His Spirit to use. This mis-focus on *ekklesia* as a “gathering under a steeple” has produced generations of pewsitting passivity among performance-seeking spectators, none of whom have any concern over fulfilling our Father’s will.

Anti-Semitic theology has also handed down centuries of **creed-based divisiveness**, with each denomination and sect demanding assent by their particular followers. Creeds and ritualism, however, do nothing to change people’s way of life. Rather, all this division instead creates denominational competition with each trying to outdo the others in elaborate buildings, dynamic speakers, and engaging programs to cater to every age group and interest. Keep in mind that among our Lord Jesus’ first followers, “doctrine” wasn’t just a recitation of beliefs. Rather, “doctrine” was the mutual way of life that resulted from collectively applying Father’s commands to, for example, a marriage, faith community, ministry or business.

The emphasis on “salvation” as an individual matter rather than on the mutuality of becoming part of a spiritual family was the product of anti-Semitic theologians as well as

most of the Reformers. Our Lord's first followers would have understood that it's in light of collective awareness that Paul could affirm the jailer, "*Trust in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household*" (Acts 16:31). Even God, who can identify Himself as "***I AM WHO I AM***", speaks of Himself collectively: "*Let Us make man in Our image*" (Genesis 1:26; see also 11:7). Just as Scripture overflows with the relational connectedness of people, so too we collectively are sons and daughters in the family of Jesus (Luke 8:21). How vast is the difference between a collective understanding of the Newer Testament commands and a Lone Ranger individualist view!

If only the understanding of our Father's requirement for His children to **mutually apply His commands together** hadn't been eliminated by theologians... ***If only*** the **communal criteria for fellowship** which our Lord Jesus' first followers gratefully put into practice hadn't been discarded by anti-Semitic intrusion... Then Christianity would be far different today:

- Divorce would be almost non-existent if the communal responsibilities our Lord's first followers practiced had been passed along through the generations.
- There would be no competition among the vast divisions of denominations and sects (23,000 in 1993; over 45,000 today).
- Everyone who claimed to belong to our Lord Jesus would be actively fulfilling our heavenly Father's will and purposes. (Surveys show that fewer than 2% of Christians are active in seeking and fulfilling God's will. This means that among weekly service attendees, 98% are passive spectators.)
- The home rather than the "church building" would serve as the God-given foundation for spiritual development. Marriage, not what goes on in the "church building", is our Father's means of raising "godly generations" (Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Malachi 2:15; Ephesians 6:4). (Less than 1% of Christian parents perceive themselves as having the primary responsibility for discipling their own children.)
- Christian businesses would be recognized as one of the key means for evangelism as they were viewed among our Lord's earliest followers. The dispersion Jews who were doing business throughout the Roman Empire made the words of the Apostle James a reality: "*For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath*" (Acts 15:21). When an evangelist arrived in a city, many Gentiles were already very familiar with the Law of Moses.

"Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" (Amos 3:3)

"Two Are Better Than One Because They Have a Good Reward for Their Labor"

(Ecclesiastes 4:9)

Christian marriages, faith communities, ministries and businesses must regain the collective, mutual understanding of God's commands, and the personal significance of our Lord Jesus being their only Head. Too many who've been strongly influenced by centuries of anti-Semitic theology have doubted the promised reality of Lord Jesus:

"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of

you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in My name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:18-20).

Our Lord’s presence is made possible through the personal guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit. And since marriages, faith communities, ministries, and many businesses are cooperative endeavors, they require two or more people to mutually participate. Crucial but too often overlooked is the process of verifying the presence of our Lord’s Spirit in each of the participants before you begin. When the third Person of the God-head, the Holy Spirit, takes up His dwelling within a person, He makes His presence very evident even as Jesus promised all who put their trust in Him—a reality which the Book of Acts substantiates (Mark 16:17; Acts 1:8; 2:4,17,18; 4:31; 10:46; 19:6).

Even if it walks and talks like a duck, it still may not be a duck. A key mistake which often spells the demise of a marriage, faith community, ministry or business is assuming that everyone is *genuinely* born again and has a viable, trust-based relationship with Jesus as their Lord through His indwelling Spirit. This one relational connection is imperative! Too many go on without confirming this and then experience disastrous results.

How Does The Bible Describe People Who Abide In Jesus?

Jesus: *“Remain in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who stay united with Me, and I with them, are the ones who bear much fruit; because apart from Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:4,5).

Over the centuries anti-Semitic theologians failed to appreciate the Hebraic understanding of God’s covenants, including the New Covenant that Jesus came to establish. Covenant basically means **“to live in ongoing union with.”** The ongoing union that’s entailed in the New Covenant and the marriage covenant are the two most important covenants which God established. They are intricately connected *abiding* relationships.

Anti-Semitic theologians altered our Lord’s requirements of **remaining united (abiding) in Him.** Roman Catholicism instituted infant baptism to assure parents that this ritual would guarantee heaven for their offspring — a “promise” which violates the biblical parameter of a sinner’s personal repentance and commitment to the lifelong Lordship of Jesus in their life. While many Protestant denominations don’t baptize infants, a number are obsessed with **“getting people saved”**, inferring that the day a person agrees to pray a sinner’s prayer is their guarantee of salvation. In contrast, the earliest followers of Jesus understood salvation as a future time for those who endure as His beloved family of slave/servants in abiding in Jesus as their Lord: *“And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved”* (Mark 13:13; also Matthew 24:13). At the Judgment Throne those who have continued to abide in Jesus on their earthly journey will have their names read aloud to the hosts of heaven (Revelation 3:5).

The **biblical criteria** for abiding in our Lord Jesus are the same for having a marriage that reflects Him, a faith community that reflects Him, or a ministry or business that reflects Him to the world. The more these criteria are in place during the time of preparation BEFORE the mutual commitment takes place, the more likely they will last in

serving our Lord's purposes and in passing along these qualities to succeeding generations. Here are the various facets we discovered that contribute to the longevity of a marriage, faith community, ministry or business. Together they result in our Father's blessing and Him being glorified through them. The absence of any or all of these will lead to discord, division, and most likely, aborting the endeavor.

1. Living repentantly.

To enter into fellowship with our heavenly Father through Jesus, or with each other for that matter, repentance is demanded by our God all throughout Scripture. The Greek word for repenting, *metanoeo*, means not only that you change your mind about your sin. It's a U-turn of your life that grieves over your disobedience, and represents a true change of heart toward God through which you determine to follow His ways instead of your old sinful way. Paul describes the "*godly sorrow [that] brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret*" (2Corinthians 7:10).

Repentance is a process which begins with your confession before our Father. The Greek word for confess, *homologeō*, means that you agree with God that you have sinned against Him and His righteous commands. You thirst for the forgiveness, the cleansing, and the restoration which only Father can give through your glorious Sacrificial Substitute, Jesus.

How does this ongoing willingness to turn from what's wrong and live instead by God's way operate in your marriage, in forming a faith community, or in establishing a ministry or business? Consider the following as a relational pledge by the mutual participants who abide in Jesus as the Vine:

"I promise, with the grace of our Lord Jesus, to live repentantly. I can't promise you that I won't sin. But I will be quick to repent and to walk in righteousness so that our Father will hear and answer each of our prayers. My commitment is that He and our Lord Jesus may be glorified in our mutual relationship."

2. Being free from the captivity to demonic influence or control.

Satan and his demonic angels were cast down to earth, and he is the ruler of this world's system (Ephesians 2:2). So if you are hoping to serve Lord Jesus and reveal Him to people, especially among groups or regions of the world where demonic principalities and powers have reigned (Ephesians 6:12), then you will encounter fierce demonic opposition. The difficulty which affects mutual cooperation is that 67% of Christians refuse to believe that the devil, of whom the Bible so often references from Genesis to Revelation, even exists. One person who believes this reality and the other who doesn't believe the devil exists cannot go on together.

Ignorance of Satan and his tactics makes it all the easier for the enemy of our souls to agitate and disrupt mutual endeavors of all kinds (see Ephesians 6:11; James 4:7; 1Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:9). Expecting and dealing with demonic opposition beforehand is an example of proper preparation, and there are dire consequences when it's not done:

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish’” (Luke 14:28-30; see also Matthew 25:1-10 with Jesus’ warning about the virgins who didn’t prepare).

When it comes to demons, it’s important to recognize that our Father uses them to test the validity of a person’s determination to be true to Him. Job was a righteous man, but we’re told, *“Then the LORD said to Satan, Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?” (Job 1:8).* And before Peter was tested to see if he would deny Jesus, our Lord warned him, *“Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you all, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:31,32).*

Next, people also bring on demonic influence or control in themselves because they are predisposed to give in to sin, as with Judas and Ananias:

- *“Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly” (John 13:27).*
- *“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?’” (Acts 5:3).*

To help His followers for all time have victory over demons, our Lord Jesus gave them power and authority to evict them:

- *“They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them” (Mark 6:12,13).*
- *“And these signs will accompany those who trust Me: In My name they will drive out demons” (Mark 16:17).*
- *“The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your name.’... ‘I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you” (Luke 10:17,19).*

The Bible Isn’t Referring to Demon Possession!

In the Newer Testament, people who are afflicted by evil spirits have been wrongly interpreted to be “demon-possessed.” The Greek word translated in these instances, *daimonizomenoi*, is more correctly rendered “demonized,” that is, afflicted or influenced in some degree by demons. The emphasis is more on degrees of influence or control than on total possession. The manifestation and intensity of demonization varies:

- the young man who was thrown into convulsions by the spirit tormenting him (see Luke 9:38-43).
- the demonized man who cried out in the synagogue where Jesus was teaching, “What do You want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us?” (Luke 4:33-36).
- the slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future (see Acts 16:16).

- The deranged man from the region of the Gerasenes who was inhabited by a legion of evil spirits but was still able to run to Jesus (see Mark 5:1-20).

“Influence” or “control” is a more accurate description for these cases than “possession”.

Demons can influence and/or control Christians:

Even *genuinely* born again Christians may experience the influence of demons within their mind, will and emotions (their soul) in areas which they haven’t yielded to the Holy Spirit. In fact, the life of a follower of Jesus must be alert to who will rule their mind, will and emotions. Will it be the indwelling Holy Spirit, or the demons that haven’t been evicted in the Name of Jesus from their soul? These unclean spirits operate from within strongholds in their soul and can sound just like the voice in their mind. (Sue had long experienced the ongoing assault of a spirit of rejection in her life. This demon had kept her silent about her trust in Jesus when she was born again. But by the authority of the Name of Jesus, this dark entity left her. She was then able to freely and vibrantly share her trust in Jesus with friend and stranger alike!)

A stronghold is a demonic fortress of thoughts in your soul. It houses evil spirits that:

- (1) control, dictate, and influence your attitudes and behavior;
- (2) oppress and discourage you;
- (3) filter and color how you view or react to situations, circumstances, or people.

Paul understood the nature of the captivity by which demons can ensnare Christians who refuse to repent. He says these individuals need to “*come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will*” (2Timothy 2:26). When a Christian fails to resist the devil (James 4:7), the following process of stronghold begins:

- 1) Satanic-inspired **THOUGHTS** are introduced into your mind.
- 2) Entertaining these thoughts brings on **EMOTIONS**.
- 3) Giving in to emotions eventually leads to taking some sort of **ACTION**.
- 4) Continual participation in this behavior causes you to develop a **HABIT**.
- 5) Once a habit is developed, a **STRONGHOLD** is built by that spirit.

Yet, Paul also assures each follower of Lord Jesus of our authority over these demonic spirits:

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2Corinthians 10:4,5).

3. You need humility in order for our Father to reveal His will to you.

Humility which emanates from your love for God and for others is a character quality upon which all other Christ-like character qualities are built. The humility to which the Bible refers is a modest or vanity-free view of your own importance. Our Lord Jesus tells His own how they must identify themselves in both heart and response: “*So you also,*

when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, “We are unuseful slaves. We have done what we ought to do” (Luke 17:10, literal).

The opposite of the humility which our heavenly Father commands is pride. A proud person is obsessed with the deep pleasure or satisfaction they derive from their own achievements or status. Jesus compares the proud and the humble in a parable which contrasts those who were confident in their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, with those who yearned only for the mercy of a forgiving God:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 18:9-14).

Keep in mind that a proud person arouses the opposition of God Himself: “God opposes [resists] the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6).

Humility is inherently demonstrated in followers of Jesus who place our Father’s will and glory ahead of their own interests or desires. The Book of Hebrews which was written to followers of Jesus repeats this warning: “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 wilderness” (Hebrews 3:7,8). Each of us who follow Jesus as Lord of our lives is being warned to make sure that we listen to the inner voice of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who indwells those who belong to our Lord Jesus reveals Father’s will to their spirit so that they will respond in obedience.

Humans are born with a spirit. When each of us was conceived, we received a spirit from God that differentiates us from the rest of creation. This spirit longs to return to God, and can return to Him when we are *genuinely* born again. The moment we are born again, we receive the indwelling Holy Spirit Who guides the humble through our spirit. It’s crucial that we who belong to Jesus keep seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit through our spirit. This ongoing direction by the Spirit and our obedient follow through is what Paul was referring to here: “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). And it helps if we listen to other followers of Jesus through our spirit first, and not just with our mind, will and emotions.

Living to fulfill our Father’s will for us in Christ both verifies that we are His family *and* ensures that we are on our way through the narrow gate:

•“For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:50).

•“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

The way of life for the genuinely born again is Spirit-led. Our Father's will is revealed to His children through the specific *rhema* that is provided by the indwelling Holy Spirit. As the various man-made forms of church governments developed over the centuries, an important element of the Holy Spirit's guidance was eliminated, the *rhema* which our Lord's first followers fervently sought and expected.

In the Newer Testament there are two frequently used Greek terms which mean "word": *logos* (law'goss) and *rhema* (ray'muh).

- *Logos* represents God's written commands and ways for mankind to apply to their lives. These are forever unchangeable. The Bible is God's written *logos*, while Jesus Himself is the living Logos, the Word of God (John 1:1,2).
- *Rhema* is specific revelation given by the Holy Spirit to followers of Jesus who fervently seek it and are willing to listen to their spirit. This practice is often called "**having a witness in your spirit.**" In the Bible, whenever the Holy Spirit gives someone a *rhema* revealing our Father's will and that word of *rhema* is trusted, His grace and spiritual power goes forth to accomplish His will.

In other words, through *rhema* the Spirit of Jesus brings a particular portion of our Father's will or commands and makes it specific for a particular purpose, time and individual. Our ongoing need for rhema was strongly emphasized by Jesus for His followers: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). The Greek term for "word" in this verse is *rhema*. And, the verb form used here is the ongoing sense — you keep seeking His *rhema* and the Holy Spirit will give it! Just know that your key source of *rhema* will always be our Lord Jesus through His Spirit in you, or another follower of Jesus who has received a *rhema* for you.

That our Lord uses humble humans is a wonderful feature about Him.

Often *rhema* will provide guidance for just one step of faith, and even for that step of obedience you may not know why. Our capacity to understand our Lord and His ways is so minute and His wisdom so beyond our comprehension. That's why He is GOD! He says of Himself and His *rhema*:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My Word [rhema] that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it'" (Isaiah 55:8-11).

A follower of Jesus must wholeheartedly seek and live on "every word [*rhema*] that comes from the mouth of God." We who belong to our Lord Jesus find spiritual nutrition as we feed in obedience on every *rhema* as it comes out of the mouth of our Lord. Our ongoing dependence on *rhema* from Jesus is humbling to our sinful soul. Seeking His *rhema* is to us what gathering manna was for the Israelites during the Exodus:

“He gave you manna to eat in the desert... to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you” (Deuteronomy 8:16). It not only humbles us to keep seeking our Lord’s *rhema* as we are commanded. That ongoing seeking keeps us humble so we won’t take credit for any accomplishment. That’s why God goes on to warn us:

“You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your ancestors, as it is today” (Deuteronomy 8:17,18).

Our Lord’s words to us bear repeating: *“When we have done everything we were told to do, we should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty’”* (Luke 17:10, paraphrase).

The Holy Spirit’s *rhema* serves two crucial purposes.

(1). Specific Action/Insight

One type of *rhema* is provided by the Holy Spirit to convey an immediate action or insight. He may use a Bible passage or spiritual gifts of prophecy, exhortation, wisdom or knowledge. He may use dreams or visions; you may hear a still, small voice within you; or a thought or prompting may come to you through which He is revealing Father’s will to you. You experience a **witness in your spirit** that the Spirit is speaking to your spirit.

One Newer Testament example of how *rhema* works is when the angel Gabriel told Mary that she’d bear a child who would be called the Son of the Most High (Luke 1:31). Startled, she asked how she, a virgin, could conceive. The angel replied, *“Nothing is impossible with God”* (v.37). In other words, every word, that is, every *rhema* that comes from God brings the power to fulfill His purpose. Mary’s humble and willing obedience to trust was faith enough for God to act. The Holy Spirit came upon her and the Son of God was conceived.

Another Newer Testament example of a specific *rhema* is the deacon Philip when he fled to Samaria during a time of persecution in Jerusalem: *“The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him”* (Acts 8:29-31).

An Older Testament example is King David, a man after God’s own heart, who sought His specific guidance for his battles. When the Philistines attacked Israel, *“David inquired of the Lord, ‘Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will You hand them over to me?’ The Lord answered him, ‘Go, for I will surely hand the Philistines over to you”* (2 Samuel 5:19). On another occasion when the Philistines attacked, David again prayed. This time God gave him a different strategy: *“So David inquired of the Lord, and He answered, ‘Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, move quickly, because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army”* (2 Samuel 5:23,24).

(2). Character Development

The Holy Spirit also uses *rhema* to guide you in applying to your way of life any of the applicable 613 commands in the Older Testament which haven't yet been brought to completion by Jesus, or the 1,050 commands in the Newer Testament. As you put into practice these Scripture applications, your character is being conformed to that of Jesus. Many people write down how they put into practice their scriptural *rhemas* so their family, faith community, ministry or business can remind themselves of their mutual applications. In Hebrew, each *rhema*-led application is called a *halakhah*. In developing a *halakhah*, you explore the written Word of God and seek the understanding of the Holy Spirit. The *rhema* He provides reveals Father's specific application of Scripture to guide your character and way of life.

The Hebrew root word for *halakhah* is *halak*, which means to walk or the way you walk. Our Lord Jesus's earliest followers were known as "**the Way**" (Acts 9:2). Their way of life reflected Jesus to others by revealing how they lived out God's commands. Underpinning their walk were the Older Testament essentials, to "Love the LORD your God and keep His requirements, His decrees, His laws and His commands always" (Deuteronomy 11:1; see also 11:13,22; 30:16). And throughout the Newer Testament is the undeniable connection of love and obedience, as our Lord Jesus makes clear: "If you love Me, keep My commands" (John 14:15). The epistles too repeat this essential link.

Our heavenly Father's intent is that you as His child establish *halakhahs* to all realms of your life, whether to your marriage, your faith community, ministry or business. 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 specific decisions and made choices from the 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.

•*Halakhahs* are not intended to be a mere code of rules to delineate behavior for each life situation you encounter. •The aim of *halakhahs* is to help you live by humbly seeking every word that comes from the mouth of God. •It's a humble yearning for a dynamic love relationship with your Father and His Son Jesus. •A major purpose of *halakhahs* is to bind a believer to God through a love that's seen in their obedient trust.

Whether for a marriage, faith community, ministry or business that desires our Father's blessing, the appropriate biblical applications should be established as to their:

- ✦ **Goals** The purpose of the relationship; answers the question of "where" the relationship is going.
- ✦ **Methods** The manner and practice by which aspects of the relationship are carried out; answers the question of "how" the relationship should function.
- ✦ **Values** The significant elements that are esteemed by the partners in the relationship; answers the question of "why" you think and/or act as you do.

When you are in the process of getting married, establishing a faith community, or developing a ministry or business, you need to establish in advance your biblical applications and the Spirit-inspired character that will guide your mutual goals, methods and values. If you haven't yet done this, then do it now. The longer you wait, the more likely you'll incur relational tensions and despair, and possibly divorce, dissolution, or failure. There are four well-practiced guidelines that lead to a peaceful process in establishing applications of God's commands—*halakhahs*.

1 Prayer.

✓To establish a *halakhah* for your particular issue, first pray. Ask for a spirit of wisdom and revelation (see Ephesians 1:17) as you entreat our Father to convey His will regarding your issue or concern to your spirit via the Holy Spirit.

2 Bible passages.

✓Next, ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind for each of you any verses or passages that would apply to your situation. (An accordance is helpful). 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, while other verses will add understanding to the foundation. When you've made the extra effort to pursue all the biblical leads which are prompted by the Holy Spirit, then a sense of peace will 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 now address your problem and concern. Be careful to not get into "if/then" reasoning as you try to apply the Word to the situation. Having gathered the appropriate verses to the situation, the normal tendency of human rationale is to immediately weigh the pros and cons: 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, for your marriage, your faith community, your ministry, your business.

4 Action to take.

✓Only after you're convinced in your heart and have a witness in your spirit 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 that God gives you to uphold His truth in your life no matter what it costs you. Remember, you are applying *halakhahs*—specific applications of Scripture—to your life because of your love for Jesus and your desire to obey. 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'll become proud and think too highly of yourself. You may even start to disdain 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 that you haven't known or lived by these truths before this time. If this method hasn't been part of your faith en-

actment 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.

Your mutual confirmation of *rhema* is crucial.

In mutual endeavors such as a marriage, faith community, ministry, or business, confirmation of *rhema* is a crucial, non-optional biblical requirement. The confirmation of two or three—**a witness in their spirits**—is a way of life that's to be cherished because our Lord Jesus assures His own of this in Matthew 18:19,20:

“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

That's why Paul could reiterate the principle that was cited repeatedly in the Hebrew Scriptures, *“Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses”* (2Corinthians 13:1).

Why is *rhema* so foreign in Christianity?

It's because of anti-Semitic theologians who for centuries supported ecclesiastical dominance (known as Nicolaitanism; see Revelation 2:6,15,16) in regard to the indwelling Holy Spirit's guidance. Having minimized or eliminated the *rhema* we've been discussing, Christians began their marriage or faith community or ministry or business with an **“outcome-based”** mindset. This means they have a certain goal in mind and they go for it. Sadly, outcome-based endeavors experience a very high percentage of divorces, dissolutions, or failures. In contrast, our Lord Jesus through the *rhema* of His indwelling Spirit enjoins His followers to be **“obedience-based.”** His Spirit guides and empowers them along each step of the way, and He provides the grace for them to accomplish Father's will. Being obedience-based is a foolproof way to lift up Jesus and to experience our Father's blessing and bring Him glory.

4. Be alert that everyone may not have the same spiritual conviction.

Not all of those in your mutual endeavor will have the same commitment to our Lord Jesus. Some may not even be *genuinely* born again or have His indwelling Holy Spirit. Giving the right hand of fellowship to another person is a very serious matter, something that should be verified by the Holy Spirit before you try to proceed on together. And, each person involved in the endeavor may have a different spiritual background. Studies have shown that Christians respond to truth and to our Lord Jesus in different ways. Each person may be one of the following:

- **Innovators** (2% of followers of Jesus) — This minority hungers to become like their Lord and to do the will of His Father. Out of love for Him they are willing to yield themselves and all that they have in order to follow in His steps. Their lives are transparent and they are humbly open about their own flaws and weaknesses.

- **Early Adapters** (12%) — These people are inspired by Innovators to follow the Innovators' purpose and pattern of love-grounded obedient trust. In turn, the Early Adapters are in a position to influence and inspire others to press on in like manner — even folks who might shy away from Innovators.
- **Early Majority** (33%) — This group is reluctant to be inspired by others in their faith walk. They don't want to be the first to respond to the Spirit as Innovators do, nor do they want to be the last to join in.
- **Late Majority** (33%) — These individuals wait for institutional endorsement before letting themselves be inspired to make any changes in their spiritual walk.
- **Laggards** (20%) — These are people who won't allow themselves to be changed no matter what truths are presented to them. They consistently resist spiritual growth or change. In the second generation of a faith community or ministry, the laggards take over leadership and discard reliance on the Holy Spirit. They begin to compromise with the ways of the world and to measure success by worldly standards.

We wanted to offer you the observations we've gleaned over the years that either contribute to our Father's blessing and to He and our Lord Jesus being glorified, or else contribute to divorce, dissolution, and failure. We've probably missed including other elements which contribute to mutual commitment or are beyond our experience. Please realize that if you do take action with your focus on the outcome and don't put our Father's will first, what makes you think He has to bless your endeavor afterwards? If you want to be sure of His blessing, then seek His will first!

Please, ask the Holy Spirit for His *rhema* to confirm what we've presented in this article, and find out if there are other elements He wants you to know about.

Mike & Sue