

September 15, 2010
Extending the Kingdom of God Today in the United States:
Beset By Great Opposition, But Not Impossible

How difficult it is to both live a Kingdom lifestyle yourself and raise a Godly family in the midst of the selfish egotism that infuses this society! Little wonder how hard it is for older men to shepherd a home fellowship family that's based on Kingdom values in these self-obsessed times. In the pattern of the apostle Paul in Romans 15:15, we'd like to review some critical points to refresh your understanding of the "big picture" going on around you in this nation.

The Introduction to our book *Restoring the Early Church* is subtitled "The Current Plight of the Church in the US" in which we discuss the three stages any society passes through until it finally destroys itself. (This was drawn from Carle Zimmerman's research in *Family and Civilization*.) A culture begins as a *Trustee Family*, wherein great value is placed on the resources and truths that *wiser, older people pass along* from generation to generation. The governing authority is normally a patriarchal structure ruled by the oldest, wisest and most sacrificial men who are concerned for the well-being of their people as a whole. Because family loyalty is held in such high regard, senior members can function as the recognized disciplinary agents so that the well-being of the collective members will be maintained and strengthened. The *Trustee Family* is the foundation for the fellowships of the early Church, and is the basis for Kingdom-minded fellowship families today.

After a period of time a civilization declines into what is known as the *Domestic Family*. A husband and a wife are recognized as a family unit that assumes major responsibility for raising their children, but with much less interaction and support from their own parents and extended family. *Government and ecclesiastical influence* begin to supersede clan impact; up until the 1950s this structure characterized most American households.

Finally, like other major civilizations in the past such as Greece and Rome, western society has plummeted into the *Atomistic Family*. Ties within the family unit have disintegrated to such an extent that *obsession with individualism* envelops the general public. Each person is viewed as a distinct unit, pretty much disconnected from any identity with their family. (This has become all the more evident with the proliferation of "virtual relationship" with others through texting, YouTube and other non-face-to-face communication.)

Individual rights are emphasized rather than family responsibilities as couples explore "alternate lifestyles" such as childlessness, "live-in" partners and homosexuality. Divorce abounds, as does promiscuity among young and old alike. Concern for future generations is almost nil, as the current monstrous \$13 trillion deficit in the US economy demonstrates. [If you'd like to learn more about these stages of society, please read the "Introduction" to *Restoring the Early Church* at our website.]

In our Teaching E-mail 46. *Developing Spiritual Maturity in an Atomistic Age* (December 8, 2009), we cite a statistic from Ron Luce in *Battle Cry for a Generation*:

What The Next Generation Will Look Like

- **Builders** (born 1927-1945): 65% Bible-based believers;
- **Boomers** (born 1946-1964): 35% Bible-based believers;
- **Busters** (born 1965-1983): 16% Bible-based believers;
- **Bridgers** (born 1984 or later): 4% Bible-based believers.

Are you gasping at this trend? During the past 80 years the Bible has been relegated to an almost *meaningless influence* in this nation. This decline has had a dramatic effect on the methods of ministry depended on within contemporary Christendom. Rather than steadfastly upholding God's Word and relying on the Holy Spirit to bring people to repentance, so many Christian ministries use methods that *appeal to the sin nature* of people. In other words, in order to be perceived as "friendly" to unbelievers, congregations openly welcome those enmeshed in the world's ways without ever confronting them about their unconfessed sin.

The *holiness* to which Father calls those who are in Christ (1Peter 1:15.16, apperceived from Leviticus 20:26) is often left unspoken and un-lived, misconstrued and misrepresented as "legalistic". This has become especially true with the burgeoning Church Growth Movement, whose marketing schemes appeal to the self-centered and self-absorbed Atomistic mindset—a mindset that is analogous to that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

If you're an older man who is determined to extend the Kingdom of God out of a grateful heart for our Lord Jesus, then put aside any focus that *numbers* of people indicate success. Instead, out of love for Him and a yearning to please your Father, concentrate on the quality of devotion that's being deepened within those in your fellowship family as you mutually build one another up in the character of Christ and work together to extend His Kingdom (Romans 14:17-19).

Shepherds who represent our Father's care for His children in their fellowship families are responsible, according to 1Thessalonians 5:12 and Titus 1:9, to both **teach** and **admonish** (warn or reprimand firmly) their brothers and sisters, even to the point of losing those whose hardness of heart keeps them from repenting. (See 1Corinthians 5:5 and 1Timothy 1:20, for example.) If you don't have the love our Father requires to admonish those in your care, then don't teach!

The repentance called for in both testaments demands that an individual *turn away from* their sin and *turn to* God so that by His Spirit their character can be conformed to that of Jesus (Acts 26:20; Romans 8:29). The biblical criterion to repent will ALWAYS be the mandate for anyone who wants to belong to our Father through the sacrificial atonement of Jesus. In order to follow Jesus, you MUST repent.

You who serve faith families as shepherds face a particularly challenging relational situation in this generation. Younger married men and women today have been steeped in pursuit of *self-esteem*, looking for personal fulfillment that wants to *get*, not give.

That's a hard reality in which to help them develop characteristics of sacrificial Christ-likeness and prepare them to take up their part in extending His Kingdom through doing *His* will, not their own! When we men who are over 50 got married, we were generally responsible enough to have a wife and provide for our family. But things have changed over those decades!

Now, so many men are still **adolescent in motivation and responsibility**. They're trying to learn *after* they're married the same responsibility we had *before* we got married. This disparity in maturity has created an epidemic of emotionally wounded wives who don't trust their husbands enough to press into Christ-like development *together*. The interpersonal tension in marriages today is wreaking relational havoc. Most husbands fall far short of the intentional resolve that's needed to maintain **shalom**, that is, the peace, order and wholeness which only the Spirit of Christ can produce in their marriages.

Remember, in order to have authentic peace in a marriage, the biblical authority of a servant-leader must be exercised (Ephesians 5:23). This means that any factors which rob a marriage of peace must be confronted and resolved. If you've read our book *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation*, you may remember this warning: "*By not supporting one another in confrontation, we knock the blossom off relationships that were meant to bear fruit to glorify the Father.*" Confronting anything in a marriage that creates emotional tension calls for extensive, in-depth conversation with each other until ALL the issues have been brought forth and fully discussed to the satisfaction of both partners. That means *listening with your heart* rather than rushing in to provide a superficial solution! Most husbands today only have shallow conversations with their wives, especially where deep emotions are involved. They fail to give their wife the emotional undergirding she needs so that she's willing to give him the respect and support he needs.

While it may be difficult for those who serve their fellowship families as shepherds to help younger couples change out of love for Jesus as their Lord, it's not impossible. Keep in mind what will help these marriages be sanctified into Christ's likeness: *The first thing a wife needs is **hope**. You can encourage her in this if she sees her husband readily giving you the same depth of deference the Bible requires her to give her husband. You'll recognize that deference if he's willing to put into practice both your Godly **instruction and admonishment**.* The two go hand-in-hand.

Two passages guide the relationship between an older shepherd and a younger man: **"We ask you, brothers, to respect those who are working hard among you, those who are guiding you in the Lord and confronting you in order to help you change"** (1Thessalonians 5:12, CJB);

"[Fully hear out the shepherd with the intent of putting it into practice], for they keep watch over your lives, as people who will have to render an account. So make it a task of joy for them, not one of groaning; for that is of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:17, CJB).

A Lesson From Vietnam

As I [Mike] am writing this e-mail, the Holy Spirit reminded me of my three deployments off Vietnam in the 1970s. I believe that there's a connection to the current problem we older men face in helping younger people in an Atomistic Age. It has to do with the *intentional deliberateness* of our labor to help younger people become more Christ-like in their character. If we're to come alongside them and be used effectively by the Spirit to help in their sanctification, we need frequent meaningful contact with them throughout the week.

In 1971, the Vertical Replenishment Squadron I was assigned to right out of flight training had 4 helicopter detachments operating on ships off the coast of Vietnam. Before my first deployment, I was required to have at least 100 hours of training in that particular model of helicopter before I was sent to a detachment. When I went back for my third deployment in 1973, our squadron had expanded to 11 detachments, and copilots were being sent to detachments with absolutely no training in the helicopter.

If you've ever flown in a crew cockpit, you know how critical it is to have peace between you and your copilot. One of the greatest contributors to peace and harmony in the cockpit is personnel who've received standardized training doing their part reliably. This is normally accomplished during a designated training period prior to being activated on station. But that wasn't the situation in 1973.

We were having to instruct these new copilots right in the middle of conducting missions, sometimes under fire! This extra burden escalated both the tension in the cockpit and the danger of our work. The only solution was that we pilots-in-command had to become more intentional in using every opportunity we had to train new copilots.

Because we often flew at low altitudes, one of our worst threats was losing an engine while heavily loaded with cargo. This was as serious as it sounds! On my third detachment an untrained copilot arrived while our ship was being resupplied in the Philippines. I took "Bill" out to train him in case we ever lost an engine at low altitude. This training involved an element of risk, as we had to intentionally cut an engine to simulate the danger. Bill was so fearful and resistant to follow through with this necessary practice that I beat him on his helmet with my metal knee board until he started crying! Finally, I had his attention.

We then spent the next two hours going over the procedure until I was assured he knew what to do in case of engine loss. The following day, as our ship left port for Vietnam, Bill and I flew out to meet it fully loaded with equipment. In making our landing descent to the flight deck, *we lost an engine*. I called for that emergency procedure we'd practiced the day before. Bill immediately executed it, saving the helicopter from

crashing into the sea.

This anecdote which was brought to my recall by the Holy Spirit reminds me that we who follow Jesus are in a state of spiritual war against principalities and powers that have now taken over much of institutional Christendom in the United States. Things we considered "sin" only a few decades ago are now flaunted both within Christianity as well as in the decadent world system. Few if any are being called to repentance as hearts have become hardened to God's perspective of what righteousness looks like and His abhorrence of sin. Why does it seem that Christians have so little influence in this nation today? Perhaps it's because the unspoken mantra of so many congregations is this: **"You can have Jesus and still keep on sinning; after all, you're forgiven."**

Those who have been entrusted to authentically shepherd our Father's children must uphold ALL of His Word out of love for both our Lord and for His people. We must be increasingly militant in our cause to raise up individuals and couples who are devoted to Christ and are determined to grow by His Spirit in ever-increasing Christ-like qualities. I remember that in everything I did as a pilot I was guided by a principle which had been instilled in me by faithful instructors: ***"Nobody is going to die because I failed to properly train them."*** All that anyone I trained had under their control was to learn the easy way or the hard way. *But they were going to learn what they needed to know in order to not jeopardize anyone else.*

If your heart is determined to see younger people grow in Christ's likeness and be equipped to extend the Kingdom of God, then you're going to have to be as intentional in their discipling as my instructors were with me: ***"Nobody is going to hell if I can do something about it."*** Then, with our Father's compassion and purpose, follow through accordingly.

These times are indeed becoming ever more difficult to lift up Jesus and expand His Kingdom. But it's not impossible! ***"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work"*** (2Corinthians 9:8).

Laboring in love with you,

Mike & Sue