

# To Love & Be Loved

Relational Intimacy Outside  
Of Religious Organization



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# Introduction

We've written this article to be a useful tool to help you carefully scrutinize the type of Christianity you embrace. Is your spiritual life based upon a personal and viable trust in God? Or, does your faith depend on religious forms and ritual practices?

The Hebraic Restoration is built on *relational priorities*. This means that certain relationships are more vital to you than others are. In the **Restoration Diagram** that's pictured, everything in your relational sphere begins with how you relate to our Father and His Son, Jesus, in the way the Bible calls for. Through the indwelling Holy Spirit your walk of love-grounded obedient trust is the most crucial of all your relationships.



Out of the depth of your relationship with the Father and His Son, all your other relationships exist. As you move outward from the center of the diagram into your home and the extended spiritual family of your home fellowship, any other relationships diminish in relational priority. You have only so much time and opportunity to expend your life, and the *first three relational rings* need to take precedence. Keep in mind that the quality of each subsequent relationship as you go outward in the diagram depends on the quality of the relationships nearer the center.

Let's return to our initial premise. NOWHERE does the Bible indicate that our God established a *religion*. On the contrary, His ongoing desire is to relate to His creation as sons and daughters He has *chosen and called-out* from the man-centered world system. In the beginning, God formed Adam in His own image to be able to relate to Him in a way that is uniquely different from the rest of His creatures. Eve was then created in God's image out of Adam and for Adam, to share that same relational privilege.

Abraham related to God in trust-filled obedience. His intimate walk with God is a model for the Hebraic Restoration. So profound was his trust in the One True God that he abandoned all that he knew in Mesopotamia to journey to a land he had never seen. His trust in God underwent the most severe testing imaginable: to offer in sacrifice his only son of the promise, Isaac.

Now *that's* trust — a trust which knew that God could bring forth life from Sarah's dead womb and restore Isaac to life if need be. That's the trust that God credited to Abraham as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). This man's obedient trust moved God to enter into an eternal Covenant to call out Abraham's descendants to live in the land He promised to them.

Think about it. Abraham is known as "God's friend" in James 2:23 and Isaiah 41:8. No wonder Paul reminds us of the relational connection with Abraham as a father to all who trust in Jesus!

"The reason the promise is based on trusting is so that it may come as God's free gift, a promise that can be relied on by all the seed, not only those who live within the framework of the Torah, but also those *with the kind of trust Avraham had — Avraham our father for all of us*. This accords with the Hebrew Scriptures, where it says, 'I have appointed you to be a father to many nations.' *Avraham is our father in God's sight because he trusted God as the one who gives life to the dead and calls nonexistent things into existence*" (Romans 4:16,17, CJB).

Jesus was delivered over to death because of our offenses and raised to life, making righteous those who trust wholly in Him. Have you ever asked yourself why Abraham would be called *the father* of all who trust God the Father and put their trust in Jesus as Lord? Paul clues us in as he continues his explanation in Romans 4:23,23:

“But the words, ‘it was credited to his account . . . ,’ were not written for him [Abraham] only. They were *written also for us*, who will certainly have our account credited too, because *we have trusted in Him* who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”

Think about this profound level of trust in regard to your own relational connection to Abraham in the spirit. He’s not alone in relating deeply and personally to God. Other key figures are highlighted in the Older Testament because their hearts were known by God to long for His presence.

- “Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). “The LORD would *speak to Moses face to face*, as a man speaks with his friend” (Exodus 33:11).
- “I [the LORD] have found David son of Jesse a *man after My own heart*; he will do everything I want him to do” (Acts 13:22).
- “Enoch walked with God, and then he wasn’t there, because God took him.” (Genesis 5:24). “By trusting, Enoch was taken away from this life without seeing death — ‘He was not to be found, because *God took him away*’ — for he has been attested as having been, prior to being taken away, *well pleasing to God*” (Hebrews 11:5)

Each of these examples is but a shadow of the relational intimacy our Lord shares with those who are indwelt by His Spirit through loving obedient trust! This is the spiritually intimate union our Lord has always sought. And if you relate to Him in the relationally intimate way He desires, you’ll live far differently than someone who just “practices religion”. The two have nothing in common!

### **Stop for a moment and consider this:**

How would your Father describe your relationship with Him? As a church attender? A busy church committee/activity participant? Someone who makes sure to take part in prescribed “Christian duties”? Or, as His trust-filled, eager to please child? Go ahead, describe yourself to someone. See if they agree with your self-evaluation.

## It Takes Two To Relate

Often overlooked when people discuss relationships is an obvious fact: You can't have a relationship by yourself. As you relate, someone is relating back to you. This is crucial when you consider your relationship with the One True God: *There really is a loving Someone relating to you as well!* Keep this in mind.

Relationships are person-to-person. They don't demand a certain form or ritual to bind them together. Relational interaction is an issue of the heart because we connect to others through our emotions. Someone to whom you are emotionally attached, including God, is someone you value in your heart. And, heart connectedness defies logical analysis.

Stop for a moment. Bring to mind the people for whom you care the most. Do your thoughts of them inspire feelings within you? When you think of our Father and His Son, Jesus, do you also experience a sense of intimate emotion, such as gratefulness, security, devotion, longing, adoration?

So many who call themselves "Christian" are in fact enmeshed in religious forms and ritual, not unlike people who follow pagan religions. A god who is boxed in by prescribed rituals and forms is a creation of your mind or of someone else's. That kind of god is a "foreign deity" who has little or no involvement in your life apart from ritual gatherings. Certainly a "deity concept" is a far cry from the reality of intimate relationship with the Father and His Son, Jesus through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

We have written many times about God's relational command in the Older Testament to *love* Him. The Hebrew word for the love He commands is *ahav*. This word means that you have a passionate devotion to Him, a deep yearning to be in His presence. Isn't this the intensity of love that Jesus calls for when He repeats the greatest commandment?

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40). This is the kind of love that takes action!

The Hebrew letters for *ahav* mean “a window into the Father's heart.” When you choose to lovingly relate to Him in the manner He calls for, our Father reveals Himself to you in a dynamic and intensely personal manner. Has this been your ongoing experience? Please stop and answer this question.

## Religion Is Man-made

The concept of religion is very familiar to most people. The very word evokes quite an array of emotional response when they think about their own experience. But religion is a man-made system. You won't find God establishing religion in the Bible.

Through systems of religion, man establishes institutionalism with its accompanying organization and management. (Today's church can "thank" the Romans for their imposed religious domination which choked out relational connectedness.) *Direction and control* rather than the relational intimacy of extended spiritual family are the currency of religion.

At the top of the control paradigm is one individual, or a few, who manage many others. The few establish and enforce the rules (through creed or tradition) that govern the participation of others. Allegiance by adherents to a particular creed of belief or behavior binds each religious system together.

### **Keep this in mind:**

Religion in itself would not exist if people weren't misled into believing that their distinct religious ritual and specific creed made them acceptable to God. And note: Religion can exist without any relationship with God.

Jesus criticized the religious hierarchy of His day for establishing a religion with manmade rules that left God out:

- "They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men" (Mark 7:7).
- "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life" (John 5:39,40).
- "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are" (Matthew 23:15).

How do you know that you are in a religious system? When "rule keeping" is more highly valued than personal, intimate relationship with God.

Sadly, with the over 38,000 competing denominations and sects in Christendom today, man is still establishing religions. And each group believes they are more correct than the others.

The profusion of non-Christian religions in the world exists without having the true God. But while any false religion insists that they worship a “god” or “gods”, or that “all religious roads lead to heaven”, there is NO other God except the ONE TRUE GOD of the Bible.

We once had a conversation over dinner with a dozen Japanese Buddhists. These men openly acknowledged that Buddha was not from the beginning, as the true God is. They readily admitted that they pray to Buddha, but “Buddha doesn’t answer prayer.” Sounds silly doesn’t it? Not to them! That’s because their focus was on *the tradition and form and practice* of their religion. They had no relationship with the one true God. But this stance is no different for many who call themselves “Christian” but are more committed to their creedal or denominational identity than to a love-grounded trust relationship with God.

Jude offers sober warning against God-less systems that divide people through man-made beliefs and fleshly practices: “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their *own ungodly desires*. These are the *men who divide you*, who follow mere natural instincts and *do not have the Spirit*” (Jude 1:18,19).

What a contrast with the fiery heart of Moses as he passionately urged the Israelites, “Therefore, choose life, so that you will live, you and your descendants, *loving ADONAI your God*, paying attention to what He says and *clinging to Him* — for that is the *purpose of your life!*” (Deuteronomy 30:19,20).

## **What Did You Embrace: Relationship or Religion?**

You may be wondering, “What does the issue of false religions have to do with Christians?” Simply this. First, there is no biblical foundation for “practicing religion” as a way of approaching the God of the Bible. He relates to people based on the condition of their heart and spirit:

- “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17).
- “For this is what the high and lofty One says—He who lives forever, whose name is holy: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite’” (Isaiah 57:15).
- “‘Has not My hand made all these things, and so they came into being?’ declares the LORD. ‘This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My word’” (Isaiah 66:2).

The humble of heart who seeks to relate to God will always find Him. The humble of heart who trusts in Jesus the way His Covenant requires will experience Him in relationship. This is what the Bible affirms. (Please read *The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*, for more on the scriptural basis for a relationship with our Lord.)

To re-cap: Religion is a man-made creation, appealing to mankind because in it man can define his ‘gods’ and how he wants them to be. *Religion* never emphasizes a love relationship of obedient trust in the One True God of the universe. If there were such a relationship, there would not be over 38,000 competing denominations fragmenting Christendom. It’s the proud and arrogant *intellect of man* which lurks behind religion and ALL of its various forms and practices.

God’s commands were given to the Israelites in the Older Testament to describe how to relate to Him and to each other. His laws and ordinances depicted for them the freedom and the boundaries that were entailed in their relationships.

The commandments of God that *point to freedom* are designed to help people affirm and grow in their relationship with God and with each other. Jesus summed up the essence of all the freedom commands with the greatest commandment: to love. All the law and the prophets are summed up in LOVE.

The commandments that *establish boundaries* reveal areas that will harm relationships. These are the “prohibition” commands, such as “Do not steal, do not covet”, which are designed by a loving and righteous God to steer you from impinging on others and disrupting the relationship.

***“For in Christ Jesus... The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love”*** (Galatians 5:6)

The apostle Paul plainly proclaims to the Galatian believers that the only thing that counts is your faith — your relationship with God — expressing itself in love. And the love which Paul is referring to is evidenced by *responsive action* and by *transformation into Christ’s character* as He works in and through His people.

The apostle isn’t saying that the fruit of faith-based love is “one of *many* things that count.” Think about that. Love is the grateful outflow of your obedient trust relationship with our Lord.



The August 29, 2004, *Parade* magazine featured an article about a noteworthy high school football coach. The article, *He Turns Boys Into Men*, by Jeffrey Marx, commends Joe Ehrmann, a former NFL star in the mid '70's. Not only are Ehrmann's goals for developing boys into men impressive, but the article also reminded us of how destructive the Hellenist influence we've written against so many times is on men in the US.

As we were leaving Israel after completing our research, a Jewish follower of Jesus told us,

**"You're going to the hardest place on earth for anyone to embrace the Hebraic foundations. Hellenism owns the church in the United States."**

Those words have come back to haunt us many times as we've done seminars over the years. The all too frequent phone calls from unloved, unappreciated wives, and from men whose intellectual acumen about the Bible obscures any loving gratefulness for Jesus, have corroborated the sorry condition of too much of westernized Christendom.

When Bible knowledge fills the head but nothing consequently flows from the heart, people have missed the intimacy of relationship that our Father stresses throughout both testaments. A lovingly grateful heart can't help but put into action the truths gleaned from God's Word and stored up in the mind to use.

Sue and I don't know Joe Ehrmann's spiritual bent, but we were intrigued by his comment, "Masculinity ought to be defined in *terms of relationships*, and taught in terms of *capacity to love and be loved*."

We'd like to quote Ehrmann's five goals for developing men of character and integrity. We've included applicable Scriptures next to each goal.

1. Recognize the "three lies of false masculinity." Athletic ability, sexual conquest, and economic success are not the best measurements of manhood. (Matthew 11:29)
2. Allow yourself to love and be loved. Build and value relationships. (John 15:13)
3. Accept responsibility, lead courageously and enact justice on behalf of others. Practice concepts of empathy, inclusion, and integrity. (Isaiah 58:6-23; Amos 5:24)
4. Learn the importance of serving others. Base your thoughts and actions on "What can I do for you?" (Philippians 2:3,4; Matthew 20:26-28)
5. Develop a cause beyond yourself. Try to leave the world a better place because you were here." (Psalm 15)

***“If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment”*** (1Corinthians 11:31)

It's vital that you examine and judge your own faith practices. In the next few pages we compare different aspects of the *Hebraic relational way* of interacting with God and with each other, and *Hellenistic religious forms*. Prayerfully go through the comparison to discern if you have been told the whole truth during your faith pilgrimage.

One of the main difficulties in any discussion about “faith” is to admit that you might be wrong. To get started, ask yourself:

- In what or in whom have you put your trust?
- Is your faith based on the creed you were taught? Is it founded on the godliness and piety of your church authorities?
- Or, is your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of His Church? Is it really? If so, then affirm your reliance on our Lord in your heart.

If you relate to our Lord with wholehearted trust as He calls for, then you are indwelled by His Spirit! Believe the promise of Jesus Himself:

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and *He will give you another Helper*, that He may *abide with you forever*—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; *but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you*. But the *Helper, the Holy Spirit*, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (John 14:15-17, 26, NKJV).

God intended for the Holy Spirit to be given to every person who embraces the true Gospel. Peter's words were sweet music to his listeners at Pentecost:

“Turn from sin, return to God, and each of you be immersed on the authority of Jesus the Messiah into forgiveness of your sins, and *you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit!* For the promise is for you, for your children, and for those far away — as many as ADONAI our God may call!” (Acts 2:38,39, CJB).

The apostle John further defines the distinction between the people who have the Spirit of Christ and those who don't:

“We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize *the Spirit of truth* and the spirit of falsehood” (1 John 4:6).

So it comes down to this. Do you really have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you? How else can you determine the truths of God if you haven't the Spirit of truth? His indwelling presence will guide you into the reality of relating to our Lord as He wants you to — in truth that translates into righteous living:

- “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6).
- “Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God” (John 3:21).
- “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

As you go through the comparisons below, take the time to re-affirm in your heart your trust in Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into the truth our Father wants you to live by. And be confident in our Lord's promise to you. Insert your name as you receive His promise: “If I, \_\_\_\_\_, lack wisdom, I, \_\_\_\_\_, should ask God, who gives generously to me, \_\_\_\_\_, without finding fault, and it will be given to me, \_\_\_\_\_” (James 1:5).

Even asking Him to give you wisdom in this matter is a sign of your trust in Him. And He won't fail you. If you are already transitioning from religion to relationship, it's a move from mind-reliance to Spirit-reliance. The tentacles of your mind's systematic rationale and attempts to box God into your intellect must be removed one at a time — and they don't let go easily! As you grow in reliance on the Holy Spirit and in your commitment to experience His love and to share it with others, your relational connectedness with our Lord and with others will blossom and bear much fruit.

## **Followers of Jesus as Lord**

### **Hebraic Restoration — *Relationship-based Trust***

Relating to God from your heart is based on understanding the Covenant relationships He establishes with mankind. His covenants delineate how to relate to Him. (Again, see *The Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*, under Hebraic Articles at the website.)

The Hebraic Restoration that is now underway throughout the world is founded on a living, trust-grounded relationship with our Lord Jesus. This walk is a heart issue that is independent of religious form and ritual.

### **Foundational Premise:**

- Begins with fear of God (Proverbs 1:7; Luke 1:50)
- Seeks growing intimacy with God (Ephesians 1:17-19)
- Lives by the Spirit to glorify God (Philippians 1:9-11; John 15:4-8)
- Relies on the prophetic voice of God. (Synagogues began in the homes of prophets during the Babylonian captivity.)

In the prophetic arena, God speaks through man to define His ways (Amos 3:7). The Hebraic Stream of Judaism was prophetic. For instance, 200 years before the Incarnation they taught “you must be born again.”

- Leads by Christlike example (Luke 6:40; John 13:14; James 3:13). Their role modeled as *a way of life* the truths they shared. Leaders were recognized by their servant heart and righteous character (1 Timothy 3:2-7). Leaders trained their disciples to be like their teacher in character as well as content (Matthew 23:11; Luke 6:40).
- Group discussion was the key method to confirm truth for life application. (Acts 28:22,24,30,31; 2 Corinthians 13:1).
- Values the disciple. Discipleship in the pattern of Jesus is based on personal relationship with the disciple, and the leader has permission to guide the disciple’s life to glorify God (Proverbs 27:23; Romans 12:2,3).

### **Analogy:**

Hebraic leaders are like *Astronauts*. They have gone out to gain wisdom from life experience, which they later share with others. The wisdom that’s been gained from *applied truth* sets them apart to serve as leaders.

- The Hebraic leader first lives out what he will use to train others. The discussions of a Hebraic teacher with his disciple are conducive to equipping them to walk in their trust in Jesus as their Lord and obey His commands (Matthew 7:24). The leader’s motivation emanates from personal experience with a heart devotion to their Lord that encourages obedient trust in God.

# **The Hebraic Influence on Christian Maturity**

***Active – appeals to the affective, expressive right side of the brain***

## **Motive**

- \_\_ Love of God and of other people
- \_\_ Life viewed as a pilgrimage leading to an ultimate culmination
- \_\_ Suffering seen as necessary for developing Christ-like character

## **Process Oriented**

- \_\_ Stresses direct participation
- \_\_ Emphasizes maturity and wisdom
- \_\_ Role modeling, mentoring, and discipleship are indispensable
- \_\_ Leadership by personal example
- \_\_ Character of leader essential
- \_\_ Personal relationships imperative

## **Biblical Application**

- \_\_ Doers of the Word
- \_\_ Bible: reality that must be confronted
- \_\_ Goal: to develop Christlikeness

## **Ministry Activity**

- \_\_ Small intimate groups
- \_\_ Leader as facilitator
- \_\_ Cooperative, participatory planning
- \_\_ Spiritual gifts shared
- \_\_ Frequent scheduled and unscheduled gatherings

## **Fruit**

- \_\_ Love, acceptance, forgiveness
- \_\_ Transparency encouraged
- \_\_ Active participation
- \_\_ “How you serve” vital
- \_\_ Each believer trained to serve
- \_\_ Produces mature believers

## **Hebraic: Foundational to Your Relational Faith Walk**

- Righteous living in response to the righteousness found in union with Christ is a vital component for authentic fellowship. Biblical fellowship is based on what is pleasing to God rather than what pleases us. Righteous living in the Spirit through loving and obedient trust assures that your prayers will be answered in God’s timing. And answered prayers produce testimonies that glorify God.

(See Volume 4, Chapter 8. Supports Communal Righteousness, in our book *Restoring the Early Church*).

- The home is the key arena for spiritual development. Next to your relationship with God, your marriage and your family hold a priority which no other worldly involvements should be allowed to compete with. (See Volume 4, Chapters 4 thru 7 in our book *Restoring the Early Church*).
- You are able to experience God in your life as you testify to His intervention and response to prayer.

## **Westernized Christianity**

### **Hellenist/Roman Influence — Religious-based Systems**

The myriad of today’s Christian religious systems have their origin in the Hellenist philosophical worldview that entered the church in the second and third

centuries. Roman organizational hierarchy then took over the establishment structure in the fourth century. These two dominating influences have produced an emphasis on *religious forms and ritual*, as well as *ecclesiastical control*.

(See Volume 3 of our book *Restoring the Early Church*, How Christianity Lost Its Hebraic Roots.)

### **Foundational Premise:**

- NO fear of God (Romans 3:10-18)
- Seeks religious forms and practices (Mark 7:6,7)
- Appeals to the soul, that is, the mind, will, and emotions (Colossians 2:8).
- Relies on educated lecturer who appeals to knowledge acquisition without life application. This method was appropriated from Hellenist philosophers in the second and third centuries. (James 1:22-24)
- Teacher's character and way of life are incidental rather than vital (see Hebrews 13:7). Rousing oratory and entertaining anecdotes are emphasized. Since teacher is not personally known, their motive for teaching is unclear (2 Timothy 3:2-5).
- Conveys content that appeals to the intellect rather than wisdom that has been learned from applied knowledge (Matthew 23:3; 1 Timothy 1:4-7).
- Attendance at religious performances is key. Individual can be taught or entertained and remain anonymous (John 10:25-27; James 2:14-18).

### **Analogy:**

Hellenist teachers are like *Astronomers*. They study and analyze from afar, but never undergo firsthand experience of what they speak about. Their knowledge never translates into applied wisdom.

- The lecture mode of the Hellenist teacher appeals to the intellect and promotes philosophical debate. The emphasis on sermonizing masks over the reality of their own uninvolvedness, thereby modeling passivity in the listeners. Paul lamented this deplorable situation:

“All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but *talking about and listening to* the latest ideas” (Acts 17:21; also James 2:14-26).

# **Greek Influence on Christian Religion**

***Cognitive – appeals to the intellectual, logical left side of the brain***

## **Motive**

- Pursuit of self-interest and knowledge acquisition
- Life viewed as a means to some day achieve a higher state of existence
- Suffering to be avoided
- People and activities weighed for self-gratification: “How does this person/ event benefit me?”

## **Program Oriented**

- Activities and programs predominate
- Leans on lecture-format Bible studies
- Relies on speaking skills, sermonizing, programmed instructional materials, information conveyance
- Leader’s personal life is immaterial
- Personal relationships are optional

## **Biblical Application**

- Belief without personal cost
- Bible: data that must be taught
- Focus on rules—do’s and don’ts
- Emphasizes distinct denominational differences

## **Ministry Activity**

- Large impersonal groups
- Leader-directed and controlled



\_\_Organizational roles and positions are important

\_\_Acquisition of knowledge emphasized

\_\_Reliance on scheduled gatherings

### **Fruit**

\_\_Mutual toleration of compromise with sin

\_\_Transparency discouraged

\_\_Passivity and lethargy

\_\_“What you know” vital

\_\_Trained professionals employed

\_\_Produces spectators whose lives remain unchanged

## **Hellenism: Key Considerations in Your Faith Practice**

- Commitment to creed is essential. You participate with others who hold the same creedal positions and denominational traditions that you do.
- You join with people who enjoy the same religious experiences as you do, such as lively worship, entertaining preaching, fun youth program.
- Scheduled religious gatherings with other like-minded people are the primary avenue of your spiritual development. Because little or no spiritual development takes place in the home, wives and children are outsourced for others to educate about spiritual matters. Husbands and fathers have little spiritual input other than grace before meals.
- Rarely does anyone publicly bear witness to a personal experience in which the loving concern of our Lord shines through. Nor are there testimonies that glorify the Father for answered prayer.