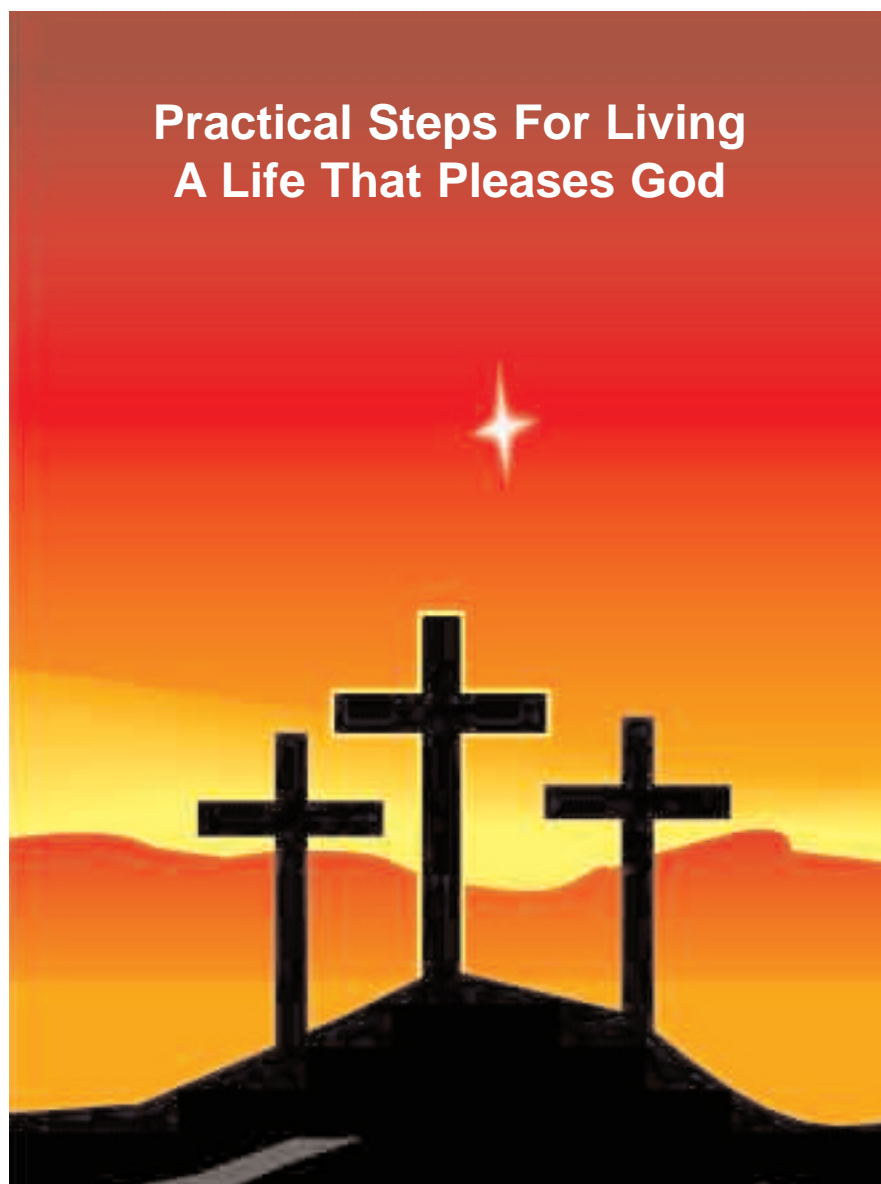


# Lifebytes:

## The Tale of Two Kingdoms (Part 1 of 2)

### 7. When Death is Good



## Restoration Ministries International

Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz  
205 North Murray Blvd, #25  
Colorado Springs, CO 80916  
(719) 573-4911

email: [MikeDowg@aol.com](mailto:MikeDowg@aol.com)  
Web: [www.Restorationministries.org](http://www.Restorationministries.org)

Dear Friends,

This Lifebyte, *When Death Is Good*, is Part 1 of two connected lessons. Part 2 is *Resurrections Into KINGDOM Living*. As you may have observed, death and resurrection are critical themes for those who would whole-heartedly follow Jesus and serve their King unabashedly.

Before you begin, we want to make clear that you won't encounter just ONE death and ONE resurrection on your journey to salvation. There will be MANY deaths and resurrections as you "die to self" and are sanctified more and more into the character of Jesus.

Sue and I hope to convey in these two Lifebytes the things in our lives that our Lord intends for us to *die to*, and His instruments for our death. Equally important are those facets of His KINGDOM that He wants to *instill in* us. Just keep in mind that your own experiences of "death and resurrection" are not a one-time-deal.

***"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom"***

(2 Corinthians 3:17)

For many years Sue and I have struggled to clarify the facets of the Hebraic Restoration for people who have been raised all their lives in the Nicolaitan system that pervades "Christiandom" in the United States. It's been frustrating! Especially talking with men, and even harder when talking with men or women who have been in ministry within the Nicolaitan religious establishment.

[If you haven't done so already, we encourage you to download from our

website our article, *"I Hate Nicolaitanism"*. You'll gain a fuller understanding of just how idolatrous this insidious practice is in our Lord's sight.]

Sharing the truths our Father gave us during our research in Israel and our ongoing pursuit of making them clear and applicable for today is like trying to free fish ensnared in a net in the ocean. We'll be building on this analogy, so keep in mind: ***The "net" is Nicolaitanism.*** In fact, there are *many* nets in Nicolaitanism — none having to do with a loving, obedient trust in Jesus.

Like fishermen who use different size openings in their nets to catch specific types of fish, the varieties of Nicolaitan expressions do the same. There is the *lively worship* net, the *orthodox doctrine* net, the *liturgical celebration* net, the *fundamentalist practices* net, the *best youth group in town* net, the *"seeker-friendly"* (but-don't-mention-sin) net, and so forth.

Each Nicolaitan net has a particular emphasis to catch their desired 'fish'. Nicolaitan nets offer a certain religious charm. The spiritually lazy can put in their time "doing God a favor"; others can reap a soulish high that costs them nothing in spiritual holiness; still others can hide out amid the throng hoping desperately that someone will reach out to them, yet fearful of what that interaction might cost them.

Wannabe "big fish" can be caught in huge nets that allow them to carry titles and responsibilities. They get their emotional and spiritual strokes from serving the system efficiently and effectively. Smaller fish swim out of those big holes looking for

**There are *many* nets in Nicolaitanism, none having to do with a loving, obedient trust in Jesus.**

something more suitable to their taste, something friendly and cozy yet not calling them to serve the Fisherman on a daily basis.

>> What keeps people in their particular net?

*That's all they have ever known.*

>> What about those who jump from one net into another?

*Still, 'net living' is all they've ever known.*

It isn't only for those who are still caught in a net that these two Lifebytes are written. **More importantly**, we're writing for those who have jumped out of the net but are lost in the open ocean. When your religious life has been based on ritual, on credal allegiance, or on any other man-made religious emphasis, it can be pretty scary following Jesus on a daily basis. Choosing to live daily under His Lordship in thought, in word, and in deed is an awesome responsibility as well as a loving privilege!

The first thing you notice when you have jumped out of all nets is that there are not many willing to jump out with you. In fact, many who stay in the net are *thoroughly unhappy* with their situation — but are quick to criticize you for jumping out!

**We're writing for those who have jumped out of the net but are lost in the open ocean.**

**Open Ocean Living**  
***"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).***

These two Lifebytes are specifically

designed to help encourage and strengthen you if you've escaped the net but haven't yet learned how to live in the open ocean. That ocean is your complete trust and freedom in Jesus Christ as the Head of His followers.

This calls for dramatic reprioritizing of your relationships: Jesus first, because He will then penetrate your marriage, your parenting, your one-anothering with those He brings your way as extended spiritual family, and those yet to encounter Him as their own Lord.

As we shall see, each person who has left net life still needs "deprogramming" from the demonic religious emphases that continue to hold their mind captive. If you don't identify the man-made religion that clings to you and discard it, you'll find yourself repeatedly jumping from one Nicolaitan net into another.

Sue and I have struggled for a long time trying to convey the truths of the "open ocean" to those who have only known "net captivity." It hasn't been easy. Have you ever tried to give someone a series of helpful instructions? While you were still speaking, they jumped ahead thinking they knew where you were leading.

If their assumptions were correct, their butting in wouldn't be that bad. But when they keep intruding with *wrong* assumptions and conclusions, it not only complicates the simplicity of the instruction you're trying to give them, it's also emotionally frustrating.

The only topics that people who have lived in nets all their lives can bring up is that which they learned living inside the net. When they talk to others who live in nets, the discussion centers around their narrow captivity of net living.

What's missing? A dependent trust

**Each person who has left net life still needs “deprogramming” from the demonic religious emphases that continue to hold the mind captive.**

in the ONE Who came to give freedom and empower them to mirror His freedom. Only the truly free can offer others the freedom they have! Then these others will respond to His call to repent and to swim within the ocean of freedom.

Keep in mind that if you leave the net and don't learn how to live free in Jesus, you will eventually create your own net. Each Nicolaitan net is a system of religion. And establishing another **system of religious practice** is what net inhabitants try to piece together for themselves. That's how we've ended up with 22,000 competing denominations and sects within the religion of Christianity.

**“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”** (Galatians 6:9)

Although the response has been disconcerting, Sue and I know without a doubt that our Father gave us the Hebraic foundations from His Word to share. Our lives are dedicated to disseminating these truths.

Yet over the years we've found that it is actually much easier to convey the facets of the Hebraic foundations to the “unchurched” than to those who have grown up ensnared in the Nicolaitan religious system. Because we use Biblical terms to convey much of what we share, churched people immediately interpret

our words within the net of their own creedal or denominational definitions.

For example, just consider the word “church.” Churched people almost unanimously think of a building or the activity that takes place there. But the true meaning of the Greek word is **“called-out ones.”** The true “church” are the people who have responded to Jesus' call to turn away from their sin, and receive forgiveness and reconciliation with His Father. They have placed their trust in Jesus and have been “called out” of the world's system to *serve in the KINGDOM* of the One True God. People, not places, are the church.

- Try this: Look up in a concordance the verses with the word “church”. Read each passage but substitute the word **“called-out ones”** for church. See if the passage doesn't seem to address you more directly and personally when you realize that you and those united in Jesus have been called out to live in His KINGDOM!
- Describe what you and others spiritually close to you think about when you use the word “church”.
- Make an attempt to use the phrase **“called-out ones”** instead of “church” and watch the consequences. It will surprise you!

**People, not places, are the church.**

During the last few weeks our Lord has helped us organize our thoughts so that in these two Lifebytes we could clarify life outside the net. Specifically, this is a call to embrace the freedom offered in our Father's restoration of the

Hebraic foundations. This means that you must leave behind the Nicolaitan religious system in which the converted Greek philosophers of the second and third centuries netted the “*called-out ones*”.

Simply, it is a tale of two kingdoms. That you understand which one you are serving in is critical.

**God’s KINGDOM:  
Relationship with Him**  
**vs.**  
**Satan’s Kingdom  
Religious Systems**

All throughout the Bible we see that our God offers us a Father-child relationship when we put our trust in His Son, Jesus. He invites us to live in His KINGDOM which He is establishing on earth. The *called-out ones* are those who have accepted His invitation to live according to His KINGDOM values, goals, and motives.

As we continue to live in His KINGDOM, our Father intends to remove all our earthly goals and motivations. His will is that we live by the same KINGDOM principles His Son lived by and taught. [We’ll discuss these more fully in our next Lifebyte in Part 2.]

Just so you will know where all this is leading:

**For you to live in the KINGDOM of God requires many deaths and resurrections.**

A life of death and resurrection is part of your sanctification that leads to salvation. You will continue to die to each core motivation you’ve acquired in the world, all your fleshly desires, all your

self-centered pursuits. Your resurrections will occur over time as you replace what you died to with learning to live by the righteous requirements of the KINGDOM. This is the life-death struggle Jesus speaks of when He warns, “*Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it*” (Luke 17:33).

Anchor this premise for yourself: The KINGDOM you are asked to embrace and to conform your life to can only be accomplished by your *actively living* under the LORDSHIP of JESUS CHRIST. It is *His rule in your heart* that separates you from serving the principalities and powers that rule the world systems. Success in the KINGDOM is found in your increasing transformation and conformity to the character of Jesus. It all takes place in your heart. [Our Hebraic Article, *The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*, can help clarify this process.]

In order to fully appreciate the “KINGDOM” we’ll explore in our next Lifebyte, we need to first understand the religious net that has ensnared so many well-meaning “Christians” for centuries. Even today, millions in the US have escaped the religious system, yet they still don’t know how to live free. We trust these two Lifebytes will be helpful.

First, it’s important to realize that systems in themselves are neither good nor bad. The whole universe operates on many forms of systems, such as gravity, wind, and tides that enable it to function according to its Creator’s order.

Yet, there are systems on earth that are evil. These are the satanically-inspired, man-made systems that enslave and control people, and refuse to serve the purposes of God. The Bible delineates certain realities about the gov-

ernment systems of this world:

1. Satan and his demonic operatives are active here on earth. *“The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, **who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him**”* (Revelation 12:9).
2. Satan controls the systems of this world, including many religious systems. *“The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant **all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, ‘I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to’**”* (Luke 4:5,6).

Satan boasted to Jesus that he had authority over earth’s kingdoms, that is, the *world systems*, and that he could give authority over them to whomever he wanted. Note that Jesus didn’t contest his right to these. Our Lord came to establish another KINGDOM, one that is *not* under the rule of Satan. Please keep this in mind: Religious systems as well as government systems often serve Satan rather than Jesus. It is imperative that we discern whom we are serving.

We realize that you may find it hard to believe that you could be serving a demonically influenced “Christian” religious system. Reality evidences that many do so in total ignorance.

The Jews who contended with Jesus claimed that God was their Father. But Jesus penetrated their lie and revealed to whom they really belonged:

*If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but*

*he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. **You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies**”* (John 8:42-44).

**If Jews who had been given the Covenants and were God’s chosen could serve Satan, do you think the chosen in Jesus today are immune from deception?**

History has demonstrated the satanic incursion of Greek philosophy and Roman organization into the “Christian” religious system. This infiltration marked the departure from the purposes of the KINGDOM. The “church system” and all its nets, not the KINGDOM, have been predominant for centuries.

#### Let’s compare a few points:

- God’s KINGDOM is *Relational*. Experiencing our Father’s love and sharing it with others is key to KINGDOM living.
- Religious systems are impersonal. *Allegiance* to their net is what creates the false sense of belonging.
- The open ocean of God’s KINGDOM gives freedom — freedom *to relate* to Him, to fully explore within His boundaries, and freedom *from* domination by evil systems of this world. *“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”* (John 8:36).

- Keep this in mind: In God’s KINGDOM, “success” means your conformity to the character of Jesus **and** your love-grounded compliance to fulfill His purposes on earth. He’s looking for your ever-increasing willingness and availability to serve. The outcome of that service is the “*much fruit*” born in both your own character and in the lives of those who respond to the Spirit because of your service in Him.
- Religious systems are bent on control and institutional growth. Creedal alliance with the institution and conformity to its standards are imperative for those who belong to it. Subtle coercion, peer ostracism, and sometimes overbearing tyranny disguised as “leadership” epitomize the rule of religious systems.

You and the gathering of “*called-out ones*” with whom you fellowship must internalize the values of the KINGDOM. KINGDOM values can be embraced only as each individual lives under the intimate Lordship of the King, Jesus Christ. There is only one Head of all “*called-out ones*” — Jesus! He is not only Lord, but the Standard by which we all measure our spiritual growth: “*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ*” (Ephesians 4:15).

- Jesus is the *only* Head of His called-out ones.
- Jesus is the *Standard* by which all who follow Him must evaluate themselves.

These two points distinguish people who would truly follow Him from those who hide in religious form and practice.

As we’ll see in the next Lifebyte, *all* of the facets of KINGDOM living are based on walking the ***path of righteousness***.

- How do you discern that path?
- >> By learning from those who are more mature in KINGDOM living,
  - >> and from your own exploration and application of the Bible.

**KINGDOM values can be embraced only as each individual lives under the intimate Lordship of the King, Jesus Christ.**

### **Unredeemable Religious Systems *Nets That Serve Satan***

Some “Christian” religious systems began innocently enough. They took root when certain individuals sought God in repentance with an earnest heart. They were searching for an intimate, viable relationship with their Lord. But sadly, over time those who succeeded them in their practices never seemed to maintain the *relational longing* of the founder(s).

Succeeding generations relied more and more on the religious system and its organizational controls than on the relational intimacy with the Lord which the founders sought.

Many years ago a close friend of ours studied the history of Christian institutions of higher learning that have sprung up since the founding of this nation. Schools such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton and others never continued the spiritual commitment of the founders. By the second generation,

those who led the institution had lost the original devotion to God.

Other types of “Christian” religious systems (nets) were formed by bitter people who broke away from other religious systems. You can recognize bitterness-based systems by their greater emphasis on being *right* than on being *loving*. And, still others formed around rebellion. Their net is *permissiveness* rather than *obedience to God’s commands*. (Much of the house church movement today is plagued by bitter rebels who have cast away perceived restraint in order to walk in lawlessness.)

You may wonder how this can happen among people who profess belief in Jesus. Remember *where* Satan and his dominion exist? Here on earth. Do you think he’s on vacation here? We’re told that, “[Satan] *went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus*” (Revelation 12:17).

Anyone who would serve the interests of Lord Jesus is automatically at war with powerful demonic forces. Your only choice is to fight or become a prisoner in a demonic net! It is only ignorance and lack of vigilance as to the demonic goals that snares so many who started out in relationship with Him and are now netted in the religious system.

In a newsletter many years ago we shared the story of a friend who had been head of a major Protestant denomination. He came to visit us several years after his retirement. I asked him how his retirement was going. He replied, “I’ve come to realize that I’ve never known Jesus Christ. I know this because I don’t know how to talk with Him. You don’t get to the top of my denomination by waiting on and relating to the Lord. You

get there by *controlling and directing the people*.” We were deeply saddened by his statement.

Several years later another leader of that same denomination read the manuscript for our book, *Restoring the Early Church*. His comment to us was, “We can’t have our people trusting Jesus the way you call for. If we do, we’ll have **mayhem** in our churches. You need to *control and direct* people, not have them trusting Jesus.”

It’s strange to think that those of us who trust in the Lord as Head of His Church could be called “*mayhem-ites*” by those who control the religious establishment. They’ve failed to understand that obedient trust brings divine order, not chaos.

It is self-evident that once a systematic, organizational process is set up to keep things running, relationship with God is no longer depended upon. At that point the system ceases to serve the KINGDOM. Rather, they are serving the kingdom of Satan here on earth.

Do you see, a religious system takes on a life of its own! Years ago my close friend, Casey, was speaking to a congregation in England. He asked them, “If Jesus were dead, how long would you go on meeting together?” The congregants talked among themselves and replied, “We would just keep going on as we do now, with or without Jesus.”

Friends, this is what we can’t let happen in our own lives! The moment we individually or collectively stop living

**Anyone who would serve the interests of Lord Jesus is automatically at war with powerful demonic forces.**

**Your only choice is to fight or become a prisoner in a demonic net!**

under the total Lordship of Jesus, we begin to serve the king of darkness. There is no middle ground. You are either a servant of God or a slave of Satan. Even this nation is no longer “one nation under God.” The proof is self-evident....

Many religious systems survive and prosper because of the *misuse* of Scripture. How many of you who have left the religious establishment have had this passage quoted to you? *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching”* (Hebrews 10:25).

That passage standing alone can make you look and feel disobedient. And that’s the response the demonic forces that control the establishment desire! You can never leave the system without it attacking you. Count on it!

The Hebrews verse above needs to be balanced with all the other passages that call for *righteousness* as the central factor of any true fellowship. And righteousness — trust-grounded obedience to the commands of Christ — is the element that today’s system does *not* want addressed. The net of “Seeker-friendly” mega-communities so prevalent today avoids mention of personal sinfulness and the need to turn away from that wickedness to find forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

The “Seeker-friendly” net is looking for numbers of people as a sign of success, not holiness in the hearts of those it has ensnared.

Righteous people in Jesus are not controlled by a religious system. Each of us who would live for the KINGDOM of

**You can never leave the system without it attacking you. Count on it!**

God will find ourselves affirming Peter’s words, **“Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God.** [Note that Peter was addressing the leaders of the religious system here.] For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19,20). And for what did they get in trouble? For speaking about Jesus!

The obvious is worth stating:

- Satan rules a kingdom that excludes God. We mention this vital fact because so many “Christian” religious systems unintentionally serve Satan.
- Where Satan is served, human control is exercised, size equals success, conviction and repentance are avoided.

**Righteous people in Jesus are not controlled by a religious system.**

### **Religious Systems Serving the Spirits of Anti-Christ and Lawlessness**

It isn’t hard to recognize that Satan reigns in religious systems through the spirit of anti-Christ and the spirit of lawlessness. The anti-Christ spirit overemphasizes the humanity of Jesus, treating Him more as “friend” than KING of Kings and LORD of Lords. Anti-Christ subtly nullifies the Kingly Messiahship of Jesus: **“Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the [Messiah] Christ. Such a man is the antichrist — he is denying the Father and the Son”** (1 John 2:22).

Satan will do anything to displace the true position of Jesus in the heart of people. Portraying Him predominantly as

“friend” reduces any need to fear Him as Lord. Without biblical-based holy fear, people become more depraved, indulging themselves readily in sin and self-gratification. By indulging their old sin nature, they fall under the influence of the spirit of lawlessness.

The demonic spirit of lawlessness entices leaders of religious systems to evaluate their success by the number of warm bodies in attendance — *counting nickels and noses*. Lawlessness must appear *like* God, but its purpose is to keep people from worshipping the true God and walking the path of righteousness that brings Him praise.

This tactic is nothing new. In fact, Paul was forced to address disregard for God’s commands mere decades after Jesus’ resurrection: *“Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God... For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way”* (2 Thessalonians 2:3-7).

The “man of lawlessness” may indeed be the system that denies fear of God’s awesome holiness and obedience to His commands. As Paul wrote, the *power of lawlessness is secret but is already at work!*

This nation, and much of the religious establishment, have entered into the age of lawlessness. God’s Word is no longer authoritative. Jesus’s words will be spoken again to many who remain captive to the religious system and fail to know Him intimately: *“On that Day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord! Didn’t we*

*prophecy in your name? Didn’t we expel demons in your name? Didn’t we perform many miracles in your name?’ Then I will tell them to their faces, ‘I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!’”* (Matthew 7:22,23).

Let it not be so for you who have escaped the religious system. Has the principality you formerly served brainwashed you into embracing *lawless* motivations and actions? Examine your heart intently: Prior to Jesus’ first coming, man encountered God in the Temple in Jerusalem. That Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. The followers of Jesus are *His* temple of worship, and we approach Him through His Spirit. We cannot let the spirit of lawlessness into our bodily temple.

### **Satan’s Bait in the Net: Tradition**

Once a religious system has been around for awhile, it takes on a way of doing things called “tradition”. Once tradition arrives at the point in which it can’t be challenged, no one can continue to serve God and stay in that system.

We are asked to join Jesus outside the religious system: *“And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore”* (Hebrews 13:12,13).

Jesus rebuked the religious system’s traditions of His time that went way beyond God’s commands because *“you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down”* (Mark 7:13a). Paul further warns us against man-made practices: *“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on*

***human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ***” (Colossians 2:8).

Both the inviolable Word of God and the holy King of Kings have renounced traditions that separate people from intimacy and love-grounded obedient trust in Him.

It's a simple rule-of-thumb:

>> When you are controlled by a religious system, you promote that religious system.

>> If you are under the Lordship of Jesus, you promote Him.

**Once tradition arrives at the point in which it can't be challenged, no one can continue to serve God and stay in that system.**

Sue and I live in a senior mobile home park, and most of the retirees here have been enmeshed in religious systems all their lives. Some attend a Bible study here every week and further their Bible knowledge. Yet, except for three we met with whom we can discuss the personal “things of Jesus”, the rest promote their own particular religious system: “Come to my church (Sunday school, Bible study)! We have a great pastor (choir, fellowship time, women’s meeting)”...or whatever.

Any time we try to talk personally about our relationship with our Lord Jesus, they end the conversation.

- Whom or what do *you* promote when you address things that are spiritually important to you?

### **A warning for ocean living:**

If you have jumped the net and left religious systems, be aware of this: the system may not have left *you*. So many who contact us about the Hebraic foundations continue to seek a *systematic approach* to their spiritual practices rather than an *intimate relationship* with our Lord Jesus.

“Why do I have to seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance? Why can’t you give me a by-the-numbers approach?” Those questions come repeatedly to us from logic-dependent minds, especially from men. But the very asking reveals a sore lack of the daily childlike dependence our Father calls for.

Just because you are outside the religious system doesn’t mean that the influence of lawlessness is out of you either. Some people, bent on lawlessness, run from religious system to religious system, even from one house church to another. Changing a system changes nothing. Only an intimate, obedient relationship with our Lord is going to bring about the necessary changes you seek. And, in order to accomplish this, you are going to have to die.

**If you have jumped the net and left religious systems, be aware of this: the system may not have left *you*.**

### **A special warning to those who have ministered within the religious system:**

Many who have been in ministry within the Nicolaitan system fail to take the time needed for death to their old motives and practices. As a result, they are never resurrected on the path of righteousness which our Father contin-

ues to reveal to the world. In most cases it will take longer for you if you once ministered professionally in the system to *fully die and be resurrected!*

Everyone who has taken the time to be de-programmed and has died to their old religious motivations — who has gone through the death and resurrection our Father requires — realizes with great pain that they never REALLY served our Lord Jesus. They were only serving the religious system.

When you are resurrected, you can clearly see that:

- >> The religious system you served had a life of its own.
- >> Warm bodies carried on the activities that made the whole system work. People serve functions so that those in control can acquire esteem and adulation from the world.
- >> Leaders of the system are controlled by ever-escalating aspirations in which *success is measured by numbers in attendance and dollars in offerings.*

You may even now be at the point of realizing how used and abused you were. You may feel down-spirited, but we encourage you to continue to press forward. Remember these words of encouragement from Jesus and Paul, two who kept their eyes on the goal:

*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is **fit for service** in the KINGDOM of God (Luke 9:62).*

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I **press on to take hold** of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken*

*hold of it. But one thing I do: **Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus** (Philippians 3:12-14).*

## Why Must We Die?

When you *patiently* take the steps to live by the standards of the KINGDOM and come under the complete Lordship of Jesus, He wants you to be *secure* in that relationship. Our Lord uses your deaths and resurrections to strengthen your love for and complete trust in Him. The pain of what you died to helps keep you from being seduced back into what you just left.

For example, it may not have been evident to you, but much of Nicolaitanism is based on your *earning* from God what He has already *freely given* to you. That enslavement is evident when you question people about their religious practices. You find that their motives are to make themselves more pleasing to Him.

Earning His love, and the fear of losing His love are the two driving motives behind many religious systems. This makes the net all the more knotted. You need to really discern your own motives before you go much further. Take some time to scrutinize your own faith walk:

- What is the nature of your relationship with God?
- What traditions do you keep that you believe make you more pleasing to our Lord?

- Are there religious traditions that you feel guilty about giving up?

*who loves his life will lose it, while the man who **hates his life in this world** will keep it for **eternal life** (John 12:24,25).*

**Earning His love, and the fear of losing His love are the two driving motives behind many religious systems.**

Perhaps you are still inside the religious establishment. If living for Jesus is not your primary impetus, and the religious system to which you belong can exist without any dependence on the Lord, it has become a religious system you need to flee! You will never die to everything that you must die to if you cling to the system.

Have you noticed that *death unto life* is the key factor in order to live a KINGDOM lifestyle? Jesus had to die in order to conquer death through His resurrection. Stephen died to be able to join the Lord He saw standing on high before him. Church history records the gruesome deaths of so many who understood the KINGDOM. If you yearn to be used by our Lord to bring our Father glory, draw strength from this passage:

*I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat **falls to the ground and dies**, it remains only a single seed. **But if it dies**, it produces **many seeds**. The man*

## The Path to Death

- 1. Demolishing Strongholds**
- 2. Repentance and Confession**

So many who have been in ministry inside the religious system and begin to read our research immediately look to set up a system around this material. "How do I start a house church?" is one of the more frequent questions.

We can assure you, our Lord isn't going to use you until He has eliminated all Nicolaitan motives and practices from your thinking. These are like ruts in a road, and they need to be filled in *His way* before you can be used to share His KINGDOM way of living.

Keep this in mind (and we realize it may be difficult for you to grasp). The entire time you were inside the Nicolaitan religious system, you were being controlled by a demonic principality. A demonic force brainwashed you, and

### From Satan's Religious System to God's KINGDOM

#### Life Under Religious Principalities

Religion, with its practices and traditions, is an end in itself.

#### Your Deaths

To all worldly and religious goals and motivations.

#### Your Resurrections

Life under the Lordship of Jesus, guided by KINGDOM values.

you are going to need a season for de-programming. This season will combine tenacious prayer and earnest discussion of the Hebraic foundations with whoever will walk into KINGDOM life with you.

Perhaps you have experienced this already. But if you have yet to leave the religious system, you need to be alert:

**No one challenges or leaves a religious system without experiencing its cruelty. Brace yourself for this pain with a loving heart, or you will become bitter and thereby hinder your own spiritual progress.**

**Our Lord isn't going to use you until He has eliminated all Nicolaitan motives and practices from your thinking. These are like ruts in a road, and they need to be filled in *His way* before you can be used to share His KINGDOM way of living.**

### **1. Demolishing Strongholds**

Surveys indicate that some 40 million in the US have escaped religious systems, but that doesn't make them free. The pain of rejection, along with tainted motives and half-hearted practices, have kept most of them in bondage afterwards. They wonder why they can't press on into the **freedom in Jesus** they see offered in the Scriptures.

It's because they haven't died to all the driving forces that the religious principality has instilled in their mind, will, and emotions. This is why we recommend that people who have left the system go through our book **Demolishing Strongholds** (a free download at our website) before they make any other decisions. Sadly, many who leave the system are those Paul writes about, people he hopes "*will come to their senses and*

*escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will"* (2 Timothy 2:26).

People who leave the system can recognize what's wrong with system, because that's why they left. What they find hard to come to grips with is that the system still holds them captive. We've previously written that when we gave out the List of Strongholds on page 37 of **Demolishing Strongholds** to congregations, we found that almost all the regular attendees of each congregation had the same agitating stronghold(s). People felt comfortable because their fellow congregants were "just like me!"

Those same strongholds still influence these people who leave until they are demolished in the Name of Jesus by His authority. In essence, demolishing the stronghold(s) is the first step in your preparation for death. If you have read our book **Demolishing Strongholds**, do you remember this important passage?

*The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish 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. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete (2 Corinthians 10:4-6).*

In our next Lifebyte, **Resurrections Into KINGDOM Living**, you will soon realize that unless you can *take your thoughts captive and bring them into obedience to Christ*, you'll be unable to live in the KINGDOM. And, in order to even take your thoughts captive, you need to **demolish the strongholds**.

On the last page of this Lifebyte we have included our List of Strongholds from page 37 of *Demolishing Strongholds*.

- Ask those with whom you fellowship to fill in the questionnaire, and then summarize your combined results below. You may be surprised about what really draws you together.

**In everything you are going through, don't lose sight of the fact that the "death" you are seeking is one of our Father's wonderful blessings for all His children.**

## **2. Repentance and Confession**

As we've mentioned, you'll die many times to your old self in order to be resurrected again and again. Repentance is the critical step for your death to be complete. A repentant heart and a willingness to confess your sins when the Holy Spirit convicts you are among the most beautiful gifts you can offer our loving Father.

Biblical repentance always demands a *turning from* sin and a *turning to* God. Do you see these two distinctives? Turning from sin **and** turning to God for forgiveness and restoration of fellowship with Him. That's the vital message in this verse: *"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus"* (Acts 20:21).

Repentance grieves you that you have grieved God. You hunger for the forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration that only He can give. That grief is the **"godly sorrow [that] brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret"** (2 Corin-

thians 7:10).

Repentance and confession flow throughout the Bible as a continuing stream of reconciling truth.

Consider this simple yet magnificent truth: **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"** (1 John 1:9). Not only will you be forgiven, but our God cleanses you from ALL unrighteousness. You are made righteous in His sight!

A wonderful by-product of your new-found state of righteousness results: **"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops"** (James 5:16-18).

Don't you long for your prayers to be answered? Repentance and confession that produce righteousness are the key that unlocks Heaven's response!

### **Entry Into the KINGDOM, and Your Ability to Live In It Require Your Repentance and Confession**

John the Baptist told those who came to him the way into the KINGDOM of God: **"Turn from your sins to God [repent!], for the KINGDOM of heaven is near"** (Matthew 3:2).

Jesus affirmed that same vital truth: **"Turn from your sins to God [repent!], for the KINGDOM of heaven is near"** (Matthew 4:17).

**A repentant heart and a willingness to confess your sins when the Holy Spirit convicts you are among the most beautiful gifts you can offer our loving Father.**

On the day of Pentecost Peter proclaimed to the crowd, **“Turn from sin, return to God, [repent!] 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!”** (Acts 2:38).

Don't ever hide or cover over your sins. There is no other relationship on earth like that which we have offered to us by our heavenly Father and with His Son, Jesus. Jesus sacrificed Himself for sinners to reconcile them to His Father. Remember the assurances to those for whom Jesus came to earth.

Jesus speaking:

*“I have not come to call the ‘righteous,’ but rather to call sinners to **turn to God from their sins**”* (Luke 5:32).

*“I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who turns to God from his sins than over 99 righteous people who have no need to repent”* (Luke 15:7).

Paul speaking:

*“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were **still sinners, Christ died for us**”* (Romans 5:8).

*“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners** — of whom I am the worst”* (1 Timothy 1:15).

*“But this is precisely why I received mercy — so that **in me, as the number one sinner, Jesus the Messiah might demonstrate how very patient he is, as an example to those who would later come to trust in him and thereby have eternal life**”* (1 Timothy 1:16).

Jesus died and rose again so we could

- repent,
- confess,
- be forgiven,
- and have fellowship with the Father.

Think about this for a moment:

***The costly death that paid for your sins is a wonderful example for you to die to your sins.***

### **Don't Take Your Sins Lightly**

Remember, if you are going to follow Jesus you are engaged in a war. Not only demonic powers but also your own sin nature assail you.

It takes your *personal volition* to avoid being tempted into sin. The Lord Jesus conveys the intensity with which we must deal with our heart's inclination to disobey God: *“And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to **enter the KINGDOM of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched’**”* (Mark 9:47,48).

Your mind, will and emotions are behind your response to temptation. The devil doesn't make you do it!

To live in the KINGDOM we must diligently guard ourselves against our own sinful desires: *“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, **by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death**”* (James 1:13-15).

These are strong words of warning. Don't let tempting thoughts hang around long enough to entice you! If the strongholds that once plagued you are

demolished, then you have the ability to “take your thoughts captive and bring them into obedience to Christ.”

### **Failing to Repent Locks You Out of the KINGDOM**

In the passages below, Paul is addressing stern warnings to believers who lived in an immoral, self-gratifying culture very similar to our own. The temptation to engage in evil and then excuse it by misapplying grace led many astray as it does people today.

*Don't you know that **unrighteous people** will have **no share in the KINGDOM of God**? Don't **delude yourselves** — people who engage in sex before marriage, who worship idols, who engage in sex after marriage with someone other than their spouse, who engage in active or passive homosexuality, who steal, who are greedy, who get drunk, who assail people with contemptuous language, who rob — **none of them will share in the KINGDOM of God** (1 Corinthians 6:9,10).*

This next list of unrighteous deeds reads like a commentary on contemporary values and wickedness. Note how many of these sins are inner strongholds as well as overt actions. And as with the letter to the Corinthians, this warning is written to those who are trying to follow Jesus within a wolfish culture that devours called-out sheep!

*And it is perfectly evident what the **old nature does**. It expresses itself in sexual immorality, impurity and indecency; idol-worship and misuse of drugs in connection with the occult; in feuding, fighting, becoming jealous and getting*

*angry; in selfish ambition, factionalism, intrigue and envy; in drunkenness, orgies and things like these. **I warn you now** as I have warned you before: those who do such things will have **no share in the KINGDOM of God!** (Galatians 5:19-21).*

And to the *called-out ones* in the largest, most well-known enclave of Jesus followers, Paul declares,

*For of this you can be sure: every sexually immoral, impure or greedy person—that is, every idol-worshipper—has **no share in the KINGDOM** of the Messiah and of God (Ephesians 5:5).*

Before you go on to the next Lifebyte, **Resurrections Into KINGDOM Living**, be sure that your heart and mind are pure and righteous before God. Then you will have ears to clearly hear what He is calling you to do, and the desire to follow through on it.

If, by the authority of the Name of Jesus, you are looking for a more complicated way of dying, we know of none. If you demolish the strongholds that may have been passed along in your family, and if you remain repentant when convicted by the Holy Spirit and confess your sins, you will die to self.

***“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body”** (2 Corinthians 4:10,11).*

**The costly death that paid for your sins is a wonderful example for you to die to your sins.**

# List of Strongholds

(From: Demolishing Strongholds by Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz)

The bold words below are demonic strongholds we have encountered in our ministry. Underneath each stronghold are symptoms that are manifested when the stronghold is present.

Place a number from 0-10 next to each symptom that is habitually present in your life. The number gives you an indication of the intensity these symptoms have effected you. We stress habitually present, not just a fleeting feeling or occasional situation.

After you have put your number down, have someone who knows you well go over your answers. They can use the second space \_\_\_ to put their number down. Total your numbers and determine which one(s) operate most strongly in your life. [To find freedom for yourself, purchase a hard copy, or download a free printable copy of Demolishing Strongholds from our website].

<b>DECEIT</b>	<b>BITTERNESS</b>	<b>HEAVINESS</b>	<b>JEALOUSY</b>
___ Lying	___ Resentment	___ Depression	___ Spiteful
___ Fantasies	___ Racism	___ Despair	___ Gossip/slander
___ Delusions	___ Unforgiveness	___ Self-pity	___ Betrayal
___ Rationalizations	___ Anger/Hatred	___ Loneliness	___ Critical nature
___ Wrong doctrine/ misuse of Scripture	___ Violence	___ Unconfessed sin	___ Judgmental
___ TOTAL	___ Revenge	___ Suicidal thoughts	___ Suspicious
	___ TOTAL	___ TOTAL	___ TOTAL
<b>CONFUSION</b> (DOUBT & UNBELIEF)	<b>REJECTION</b>	<b>PRIDE</b>	<b>RELIGIOSITY</b>
___ Suspicious	___ Addictive behavior	___ Vain	___ Seeks activities
___ Apprehensive	___ Compulsions	___ Self-righteous	___ No spiritual power
___ Indecisive	___ Seeks acceptance	___ Self-centered	___ Spiritual blindness
___ Skeptical	___ Unworthiness	___ Insensitive	___ Hypocritical
___ Unsettled	___ Withdrawal	___ Materialistic	___ TOTAL
___ TOTAL	___ TOTAL	___ Seeks positions	
		___ TOTAL	
<b>INDEPENDENCE</b> & DIVORCE	<b>STUPOR &amp;</b> <b>PRAYERLESSNESS</b>	<b>REBELLION</b>	<b>FEAR &amp; INSECURITY</b>
___ Insensitive	___ Distanced from God	___ Self-willed	___ Inferiority
___ Lonely/Aloof	___ "Cold" love	___ Stubborn	___ Inadequacy
___ Self-determined	___ Distracted	___ Pouting	___ Timidity
___ Devil's advocate	___ Spiritual blindness	___ Strife	___ Pleasing people, not God
___ Withdrawn	___ Laziness	___ Factious	___ Lack of trust/worry
___ Excuse making	___ Deceived self-appraisal	___ Divisive	___ Phobias
___ Lack of trust	___ TOTAL	___ Anger leads to argument	___ Perfectionism
___ "Martyr" complex		___ Independent	___ Dread of failure
___ TOTAL		___ Unteachable	___ Inability to set goals
		___ TOTAL	___ "Motor-mouth"
			___ TOTAL
<b>CONTROL</b>	<b>SEXUAL IMPURITY</b>	<b>IDOLATRY</b>	
___ Manipulative	___ Lust	___ Frustrated	
___ Striving	___ Seductiveness	___ Hopeless	
___ Lacking trust	___ Masturbation	___ Greedy/selfish	
___ Devil's advocate	___ Fornication	___ Financial problems	
___ Insensitive	___ Adultery	___ Wrong goals/decisions	
___ Desiring recognition	___ Frigidity	___ Living a lie	
___ Violent	___ Homosexuality	___ Apathetic	
___ TOTAL	___ Pornography	___ TOTAL	
	___ TOTAL		