

Cyber Truths By E-mail

28. Practicing Biblical Gatekeeping (July 10, 2007)



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**Gatekeeping —
A Critical Bible Responsibility —
But WHO is Responsible
and HOW Is It Accomplished?**

Dear Friends,

The other day Sue was reading the Spring 2007 issue of Viewpoint: Confronting the Issues of America's Heart and Home published by our friend Chuck Crismier, founder of Save America (www.saveus.org). Chuck notes 4 reasons for the Internet being a prominent vehicle of delivering biblical truth. This particular reason jumped out at us:

"The Internet enables us to 'circumvent the gatekeepers' within the American church who, believe it or not, are increasingly seeking to stifle the flow of God's truth both to professing believers and the world under the guise of "marketing" and being "seeker sensitive."

This quote reminded us of our July 1997 newsletter, *Today's Gatekeepers*. Ever since we've tried to share our research on the Hebraic restoration, we've been confronted by the so-called 'gatekeepers' of today who control what Christians are hearing and believing. We know what our friend Chuck has been up against as he's also tried to proclaim an unpopular message that doesn't tickle religious ears or make people "feel good" in their compromise with the world.

Gatekeepers are those who take upon themselves the responsibility of a position of control and power to determine what others hear and/or believe. One source has noted five contemporary

gatekeepers in Christendom today:

1. Clergy
2. Seminaries
3. Parachurch ministries
4. Publishers
5. Media (such as TV, movies, radio, Internet)

Sue and I have encountered most of these gatekeeping functionaries during our years of ministry. Thirteen years ago when we sent the Restoring the Early Church and Demolishing Strongholds manuscripts to publishers, we received pressure to water-down our message to make it more widely palatable, thus more marketable. (We refused to alter what our Lord had given us to share.) In the media arena, we've participated in several dynamic radio interviews, but still, an issue with many stations is marketability—money; and whether we're willing to make our message "user friendly". (There's no way to confront the darkness of iniquity and sin except to call for response to God and His truth: to turn away from sin as detestable and turn to Him for loving forgiveness and reconciliation! The lifelong pilgrimage of walking in love-grounded obedient trust according to His Spirit and His Word is neither popular nor easy!)

As part of his mobile ministry, the apostle John encountered a type of 'gatekeeping' opposition similar to what we've experienced. Writing to Gaius, a beloved brother in Jesus who was part of an extended spiritual family, John praised this band of called-out ones for their faithfulness and kind hospitality. However, a letter by John that was earlier carried to these believers brought about malicious, groundless gossip and spiteful slander against both John and

the faithful brothers who came to them — perpetrated by a gatekeeper who insisted on monitoring and filtering whatever was taught and whoever was welcomed. This man, Diotrephes, took counsel from no one! Both his motive — his personal ambition of preeminence — and his deeds reflected an arrogant, self-centered perspective that the called-out ones were his personal fiefdom, and that he was their guardian and master!

This particular gatekeeper had no qualms about excluding either the brethren from John who held to biblical truth or those who sided with them!

“I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church” (3 John 9,10).

Sue and I have on occasion met the ‘Diotrephes’ individuals and systems of today — those who determine what's best for other Christians to be exposed to, and strictly restrict and reject any view that differs.

One of the primary issues facing the early Church was determining and confirming truth so that it could be lived by. This was vitally important so that new followers of Jesus could walk according to the Spirit and the Word in a way that pleased our Father. We refer to this function of substantiating and confirming truth as “the process of gatekeeping.” In

other words, who or what process(es) should be used to determine God’s truth and how it should be implemented in each life situation?

As we've written on previous occasions, the usual method of confirmation came from two or three witnesses as they were guided by the Holy Spirit (see Deuteronomy 19:15, Matthew 18:16, 2 Corinthians 13:1). If a dispute over a decision was anticipated, the believers could also cast lots to determine truth (see Proverbs 18:18, 16:33).

On the first page of our website we make a statement to encourage you to use the biblical process of gatekeeping to confirm your own faith practices:

Be Sure To Discuss The Truths On This Website With Others
DISCUSSION Is The Hebraic Method Of Pursuing Truth And Applying It

Through the material at the website which is founded on God's Word, we anticipate that you'll be able to take appropriate steps of action all along your faith journey to bring Him praise. We hope that you'll be strengthened in your walk with our Lord Jesus and be revitalized in your relationships of marriage, family, and load-bearing friends. You can't just read these truths in order for them become part of your life. You need to discuss them with others who will earnestly press on in the faith with you. Discussion is the Hebraic method of pursuing truth and applying it. In fact, the rabbis of the Hebraic Stream taught that whenever two or three discussed God’s Word, the Holy Spirit was with them to give understanding and application.

Jesus commends the connection between mutual discussion and agreement by promising His presence when this takes place:

“I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven.

For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them”
(Matthew 18:18-20).

The presence of Jesus in your midst as you pursue truth makes all the difference in the world. He confirms His truth for you and also stirs you to put it into practice to serve in His Kingdom! So please, don't just read what you find in this e-mail, discuss it with others!

Thoughts for You to Consider and Discuss:

- Who should be the gatekeepers among His called-out ones today?
- What process do you use to confirm God's truth?
- Who should be able to minister communion in their faith family?
- Who should be able to baptize?

Because of our biblical stance against Nicolaitanism, some of you may think that we are "anti-pastor". Far from it! The exercise of Godly pastoring by older men to whom our Father has given loving concern for nurturing and guiding His children is sorely needed today. What we're warning His people against is the thing God hates—the Nicolaitan system which is behind the clergy-laity distinc-

tion in Christendom today. This system of practice is what's hindering the priesthood of all the followers of Jesus from being enacted on a daily basis by those who are wholeheartedly walking in step with His Spirit.

Please, examine your heart honestly. Are you complacently hiding out in a Nicolaitan system with your religious life filled with activities while someone else tells you what to believe, yet you have no ongoing intimacy with Jesus being evidenced in your life? Tragically, you are in sin. Don't force the God Who loves you to painfully raise the stakes for you to yield to His way and His Word as He did time and again with His people Israel (see His pattern, for example, in Psalm 107). Paul warns Timothy that in the last days there will be those ***“having a form of godliness but denying its power.”*** He goes on to exhort, ***“Have nothing to do with them”*** (2 Timothy 3:5).

God is still speaking through His prophet Jeremiah to those today who have forsaken His awesome and holy Self in order to worship at the feet of a god of their own desire and creation—fed to them by unbiblical gatekeepers:

“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jeremiah 2:13).

The gatekeepers of religious systems have created their own programs and practices, a mixture of belief and tradition that follows the principles of worldly management systems rather than utilizing the gatekeeping process Jesus calls for in Matthew 18:18-20.

It can't have passed your notice that compromise and toleration have become the bywords of the religious system as worldly goals, self-gratifying values and man-centered methods have infiltrated man's concept of "church". So many have forsaken the pattern of love-grounded obedient trust that would evidence the Church which Jesus promised to build. But such an intentional life of wholehearted trust in Him calls for load-bearing family in Christ who pursue meaningful discussion that leads to applying God's Word.

Let's look once more at God's pattern for leading and guiding faith communities. Our God chooses elders/shepherds to "guard the gate." Elders, the biblical gray-haired zakens of the synagogue and early Church, were gatekeepers in the mold of their Hebraic, sheep-tending forefathers:

“Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder [no ecclesiastical position noted here] and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a sharer also of the glory that is about to be revealed, shepherd [guide, guard, lead to nourishment] the [little] flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but willingly [heart motivation], according to God [as unto Him and His will and His ways]; and not from eagerness for sordid gain, but eagerly [with readiness]; nor as exercising lordship over those allotted to your charge, but becoming examples [pattern, role model] to the [little] flock” (1 Peter 5:1-3, from the Greek).

The word "little" we've inserted comes from a diminutive form of the

word for flock that's used by Peter, giving the impression that these elders had intimate knowledge of their relatively few "sheep" rather than oversight of a whole organization of many believers.

Paul clearly portrays the gatekeeping role of biblical shepherds in his heartrending instructions to the elders he summons from the called-out at Ephesus, people whom he'd taught both in public venues and from house to house (see Acts 20:17,20):

“Keep watch [intentionally hold your mind toward; beware of danger] over yourselves and all the [little] flock of which the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers [literally, watchers, exercising watchful care] to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. And from among you yourselves will arise men speaking distorted things [perverting the truth with intent to mislead or corrupt] in order to drag away the disciples after them. So be on your guard [vigilantly watchful]! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears” (Acts 20:28-31, from the Greek).

Remember, there was a plurality of elders who cooperated together with no one more important than another. Their decisions and counsel for nurturing and guarding a flock were collectively considered and discussed. Then they were able to offer an appropriate application of God's Word to a situation facing a particular follower of Jesus or the extended spiritual family as a whole. Elders used

the process of gatekeeping according to the example and precedent of their Hebrew ancestors. Such an example would be found in the book of Ruth, chapter 4. Boaz, eager to uphold the law of kinsman-redeemer, approached the elders for a halakhic decision (an application of God's Word) as to whether he had the right to marry Ruth. (See also Acts 15 for another example of the process of gatekeeping by those who were watchful on a larger basis than the flock of Jesus walk according to His way.)

Our research indicates that the true elders of the early Church who guided and guarded the people of God were older, wise, gray-bearded men who met the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. In other words, in contrast to the widely practiced roles of today:

- There were **no clergy** in the early church who acted as gatekeepers.
- There were **no seminaries** in the early church who acted as gatekeepers.
- There were **no parachurch ministries** in the early church who acted as gatekeepers.
- There were **no publishers** in the early church who acted as gatekeepers.
- There were **no media** in the early church who acted as gatekeepers.

Our spiritual forefathers relied on the gatekeeping process of confirmation by two or three, and the role of gatekeeping in faith communities by the older men who shepherded our Father's children.

Truly follow the pattern prescribed in God's Word. Serve King Jesus our Lord in loving trust through prayerful discussion that leads to application in your life, and praying for gatekeepers in your midst who lovingly serve Him as they serve

their extended spiritual family. Do you want to experience the vitality and fruitfulness of the early followers of Jesus? Then follow their example as they followed Him according to the processes established in His Word!

Your servants in the Kingdom,
Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz