

# I Hate Nicolaitanism! (Part 3)

## Living Out God's Word: A Hebraic-Hellenist Comparison

This chart contrasts the different emphases and methods of ministry used by Hebraic and Hellenist Christianity. The dissimilarity in the fruit each produces is substantial. Go down each list and put a check mark next to each item that describes your religious experience to date.

Take some time to discuss this chart with others who are close to you in your faith pilgrimage, and who will go on with you to incorporate the biblical Hebraic foundations into your faith practice.

In the Hebraic pattern of the earliest church, *discussion leading to application* is the effective way to learn. Lectures and reading bring about little or no change in men. Their minds may get filled, but they themselves are *not changed*. Recent studies have supported the importance of both discussion *and* role modeling in training men to be changed into Christlikeness. Both are vital if we are to restore what once was normal for our forefathers in the faith as they led our Father's children.

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### **Hebraic** Active—*Appeals to the heart* [right side of the male brain]

#### **Motive**

- Love for God and others
- Life viewed as a pilgrimage leading to an ultimate culmination in heaven
- Suffering seen as necessary for development of Christ-like character

#### **Process Oriented**

- Stresses direct participation
- Emphasizes age and wisdom
- Role modeling, mentoring, and discipleship 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**

—Total

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### **Hellenism** Cognitive—*appeals to the intellect* [left side of the male brain]

#### **Motive**

- Pursuit of self-interest and knowledge
- Life viewed in circular terms, 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**

- Heavy program prominence
- Emphasizes education and knowledge
- Relies on speaking skills, oratory, programmed materials, information conveyance
- Leader's personal life immaterial
- Personal relationships optional

#### **Biblical Application**

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

#### **Ministry Activity**

- Large impersonal groups
- Leader-directed and controlled
- Organizational roles important
- Acquisition of knowledge emphasized
- Reliance on scheduled gatherings

#### **Fruit**

- Mutual toleration
- Transparency discouraged
- Passivity and lethargy
- "What you know" vital
- Trained professionals utilized
- Produces spectators**

—Total

## Hebraic: *Gathering of Home Fellowships* [a fellowship of homes based on righteous relationships]

A home fellowship is really a fellowship of committed families and individuals who meet in homes. These followers of Jesus are extended spiritual family! It's not their meeting together in their homes that makes them strong, but the determination of each member to *live* the righteousness of Jesus every day.

### Hebraic Home Fellowships

Factors that distinguish a Hebraic home fellowship are:

- Primarily concerned with glorifying our Father
- Communal righteousness is paramount
- Prayers are answered, yielding powerful testimonies
- Committed 24/7 relationships
- One-anothering of extended spiritual family
- Biblical authority is exercised
- Intergenerational connectedness
- Scheduled and unscheduled meetings
- Recreational pastimes shared

### Righteousness:

#### ***You Have NO Fellowship Without It***

Chapters 11 and 12 of *Restoring the Early Church* and Chapter 13 of *Pastoring By Elders* deal thoroughly with the cornerstone of fellowship in a home group — upholding communal righteousness. God ordained meeting in homes because He was aware of man's inclination to sin and reluctance to repent. Relational accountability in a small intimate group helps people stay repentant so the fellowship experiences answered prayers.

By His own limitation, our Father refuses to hear the prayers of those who refuse to repent, and choose instead to hold on to

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their wickedness: *“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against the wicked”* (1 Peter 3:12).

Our earliest forefathers in the faith were conscious of their responsibility for *communal righteousness*. They knew from examples such as Achan in the Hebrew Bible that one person's unrepentance hinders the prayers of everyone else.

The first issue for all family heads and elders of fellowships was the maintenance of righteousness within their respective homes and fellowship of homes. Without communal righteousness, prayers go unanswered and our Father receives no glory. But with repentance comes powerful response!

*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. 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).

Elijah-sized results are powerful testimonies to encourage believers and catch the attention of unbelievers! The Book of Acts cites examples of the need for answered prayer. Followers of Jesus gathered in homes

rather than the Temple to pray for those needs. Peter's miraculous release from prison is one of many examples of our Father answering the prayers of righteous people who got together in homes as spiritual family. Remember, it was answered prayer and changed lives that got the early Church noticed!

### **Load-bearing:**

#### ***Personal Loving-care to One Another***

We are told that the fellowships of the earliest church "*had all things in common.*" Their mutual regard for each other and their desire to serve was of greater importance than personal ownership of property. This loving interconnectedness wasn't meant for just the earliest Church, but was a hallmark of all followers of Jesus toward one another. Loving commitment as extended spiritual family is all day, every day!

The intergenerational connectedness brought together the *wisdom* of the older men and women with the *needs* of the younger to deal with life's problems. To be a *zaken*, a respected elder, was a high aspiration for every young man who diligently sought wisdom by applying God's Word to his life. Within the home fellowship, the council of the wise was readily available to those who sought wisdom.

Older women taught the younger ones how to love their husbands and families, and encouraged the younger women to grow into the example of the Proverbs 31 older woman.

### **Outreach**

If you're a dedicated follower of Jesus, you are personally representing His love to all mankind. The eternal destiny of everyone the Messiah died for is probably weighing heavy on your heart.

Fulfilling that goal with others in your fellowship family begins with each home establishing relationships in their neighborhood, workplace, school, and social sphere. It's through *personal relationships* that unbelievers are reached as friends and opened up to understand who Jesus really is. By walking alongside them as a friend and bearing in prayer the burdens they reveal to you, you'll be mirroring Jesus to them.

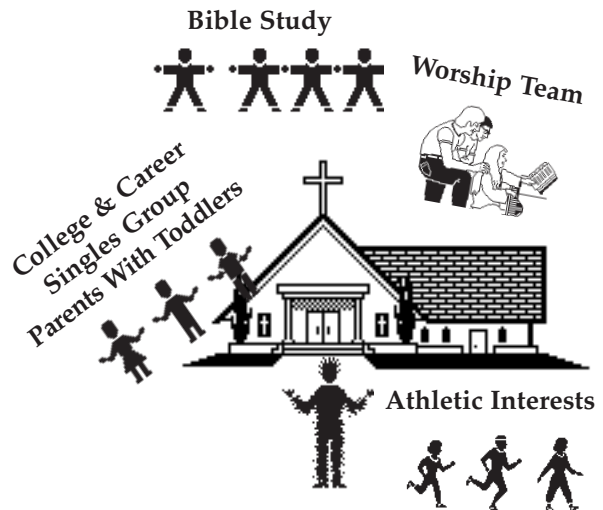
Many home groups make the mistake of inviting unbelievers into their worship gatherings. This unintentionally allows wolves of worldly values in! Instead, invite some of your extended spiritual family over on a casual basis to interact with your unbelieving friends. Let them see your joyous one-anothering in action and be "jealous" for that relationship with God that moves them closer to repentance!

If and when your unbelieving friend turns to our Lord as one of His own, that's the time to incorporate him into the home fellowship family to be nurtured and disciplined. That way, your faith family grows naturally by new births rather than opening the door to drifters from other congregations who are looking to appease self-interest.

## Hellenism: *Congregation with Small Groups* [reliance on activity-based religious forms]

### Nicolaitanism Isn't About Love, But Religious Activities

Since so many of us are products of Hellenist Christianity, let's remind ourselves of what we're leaving behind. It's sometimes difficult to adjust from an *activity-based system* into an *extended spiritual family* that's built upon relationships with both God and each other. Frequently a time of isolation faces those courageous enough to make the transition. Perhaps this is our Lord's way of testing whether you're convinced of His all-sufficiency or if you miss the religious crowds.



### Show Up For the Scheduled Event

Activity-based systems always leave a hollowness in your soul. Initially, everything seems okay because of the crowds of worshipers and your proximity to others in the pews or chairs next to you. But you hunger for something more intimate, with both God and other people.

Factors that distinguish Hellenist Christianity:

- People are concerned more with having their own needs met than with fulfilling God's will
- Religious practice is disconnected from the rest of your life
- Activities are paramount, while strong relationships are optional
- Relies heavily on scheduled meetings
- Control rather than biblical authority is exercised
- Homogeneous and Affinity Groups of like interests are extremely common
- Any small group gatherings focus on a topic rather than on relational growth as family in Jesus

### An Efficient System

Hellenist Christianity provides the means for one or a few to dominate and control a large number of people. It requires NO per-

sonal knowledge of, or ongoing contact with, the ones you're leading. You just schedule an event that meets their desires and the people come. This system reflects management and control, not personal role modeling and interconnectedness.

The recent growth of affinity groups rather than intergenerational relationships has missed one of the greatest needs facing Americans today. Affinity programs group you with others who have similar tastes or characteristics, such as College and Career, Divorced, Seniors, Parents of Teens, Recovering Alcoholics.

The Nicolaitan domination brings efficient management, but does nothing to develop personal maturity in Christlikeness.

### A Sad Heritage

The most painful part of this reality is that the "laity" like it this way! "Church" has more to do with pleasing *them* than with pleasing God. Hellenist church attendees have little or no desire to touch the world for Jesus. Given the estimated 600,000 Hellenist congregations in this nation and the deplorable moral state we find it in, my assertion is borne out. George Barna's surveys corroborate: the moral convictions of churchgoers match those who do not attend services.

The Hellenist Church experience is like going to a movie. After the entertainment is done, you have no further responsibility to fulfill the purposes our Father would like to accomplish through each believer. The “safe place” church-building gatherings diminish any opportunity for personal accountability and one-anothering.

Consider the possibility that on any given Sunday morning in Protestantism, over 50% of the clergy standing in front have been or are actively involved in an adulterous affair.



In Catholicism an untold number of pedophiles and homosexuals are leading worship. So many laity would like to believe it is not *their* pastor or priest. Why? Because it permits them to go on with the same lack of accountability that the adulterer or pedophile in front of them has. Yet no one grieves that our Father is being violated as His Name is brought down by those who say they're “Christian.”

Over 40 million born-again believers have left the Hellenistic system. Some are still wandering, trying to find the truth. We trust that they and you will take a strong look, and prayerfully ask our Lord if He is restoring the opportunity for you to be part of the Church that Jesus says He is building.