

I Hate Nicolaitanism! (Part 5)

Hebraic Home Fellowships

Relationally-Connected Men Produce Successors in Leadership

In the earliest Church, men in authority mentored their successors to replace them at each level. They shared their lives with those in their care and role modeled a God-fearing lifestyle. These men walked in relational closeness. Each home fellowship of extended spiritual family looked like a “formation” of close relationships that were designed to produce successors in leadership. Each future successor “flew from” on someone else with whom they were relationally connected. There was no central “control” person. The council of men brought about wise, biblically-based decisions, and the elders carried out those decisions.

In our illustration, each man in the formation is helping the one immediately behind him. Just like the bomber squadrons of World War II, if the leader gets hit, someone else picks up the leadership. This type of leadership replacement is being carried out dramatically among our persecuted family in Christ in other parts of the world. It will probably be needed in the US sooner than most want to believe.

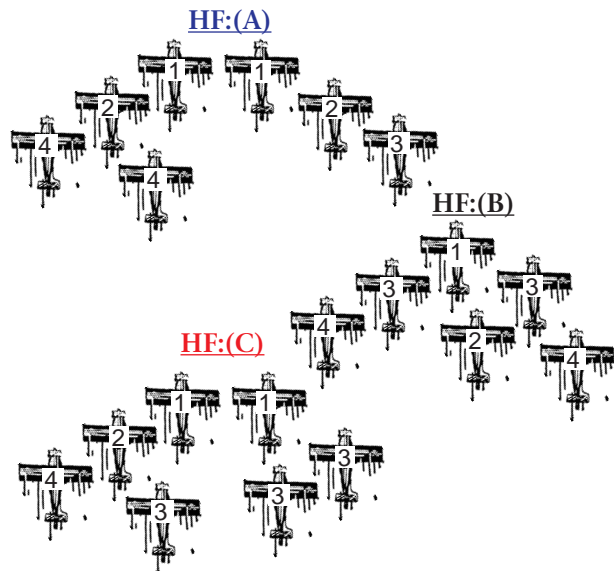
Discipleship: *Connected Relationships*

Use this key to identify the maturity of the men in each fellowship of families.

Home Fellowship — HF:()

- 1: Qualified Elder
- 2: Almost Qualified; mature in years, but needs more character development
- 3: Man nearing maturity; needs more life experience and character development
- 4: Younger man; needs many more years of experience and character development

Remember the chart we discussed earlier regarding the Authority Advancement? A



man is given authority by God as the head of his household. What promotes him to higher positions of authority is based upon his *enactment* of his current role.

An elder’s position is not ecclesiastical, but one of *earned respect*. He, like the men in his care, began his authority as a husband. Because of his years of life experience and acquired wisdom, he has authority as an elder to both role model a way of life that pleases God, and to teach biblical principles as a way of life. This involves far more than leading a Bible study or using a prepared curriculum to impart knowledge. The elders’ very lives are exposed their home fellowship family!

The illustration indicates a variety of ways that men in home fellowships can form their relational accountability. For instance, in Home Fellowship A, two elders have men “flying formation” on each of them, respectively. If the group became too large for them to meet together conveniently, they could easily divide and form two home fellowships that could meet “congregationally” for worship or social gatherings.

Size Limit

The size of a home fellowship is limited by the elder(s)' ability to render account to our Father for the men who "fly formation" on his leadership. This is crucial! "*Obey your leaders and submit to them. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you*" (Hebrews 13:17).

The personal ability of the elder(s) and the time available to fulfill their responsibility limits the size of the fellowship. They are leading and mentoring men with whom they have personal, ongoing contact, not detached management of a group of people.

I personally have found that I can't render account to my Father for more than 5 or 6 men in a loadbearing capacity as brothers. Beyond this number something personal starts to disappear, and the loss can be felt by everyone.

Practical Considerations for Elders

[The information in this section augments the recommendations we've included in *Restoring the Early Church* and *Pastoring by Elders*.]

Several years ago the first home fellowship I eldered grew too large, and I found myself *managing* a group. Our 24/7 commitment with each other became shallow. One weekend we all went away on a retreat together. As we sought the Lord for guidance in prayer, a woman stood up and asked permission to subdivide the group.

As we gathered into two groups, all of us felt a witness in our spirits that this was God's will for us in order to continue one-anothering and to bring in new disciples. The second home fellowship was led by a man who had been flying closely with me for some time and was ready to elder.

Just a note: Our gathering of home fellowships congregated weekly at a rented gym with other home fellowships. Our own home fellowship family met an hour early because we wanted to spend time with each

other. Our kids played and we talked or prayed together. It wasn't unusual for us to spend our entire Sabbath together. We also had a lot of personal and phone contact throughout the week, as well as spontaneous encounters with each other.

I also like to meet with the men once a week, usually on Friday at 5AM. This proved to be the best time for not interfering with family life, and provided opportunity to gain wise counsel through discussion with each other. A rule of thumb for us was a wise saying we had heard:

- **If you spend 2 hours or less with a person, you have an *event*;**
- **If you spend over 2 hours with a person, you have an *experience*.**

We all wanted to *experience* each other, and we achieved it by getting together at 5AM instead of a time that was more convenient for the flesh but less conducive for our purposes!

What about men who have controlling or manipulative wives? Our weekly men's gathering helped considerably to support their biblical position as well as their enactment in their families. "Getting together for an experience" for the wives each week gave them access to encouragement by the other wives and opportunity to talk with the wives of the elders. "*Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children*" (Titus 2:3,4). Frequent phone contact and stop-bys also deepened the discipling relationships.

Gender Learning Differences

Because men and women differ in so many ways, it's no surprise that our learning styles are also unique. The diagram on the next page depicts how each gender is influenced *to change*. Role modeling is a vital component for both genders. Confrontation, however, provokes men to change

Effecting Change in Males and Females

<u>Men:</u>	<u>Effect</u>	<u>Women:</u>	<u>Effect</u>
Role models	Very Positive	Role models	Very Positive
Confrontation	Very Positive	Education	Very Positive
Education	No Effect	Confrontation	Minimal

their ideas or direction, but generally adversely affects women. Women tend to react to the *emotion* of the confrontation and overlook the content of the encounter.

Men can attain volumes of educational information but not make any change at all based on what they learned. On the other hand, women can read a book or hear a lecture and, based on that input, immediately make changes in their lives. Unfortunately, education rather than role modeling or confrontation is the method of choice in Hellenist Christianity, negating the training that is needed to produce mature men. Education just doesn't teach a man a *way of life*.

Two important elements are absent from Hellenist Christianity: *confrontation and admonishment*. Two passages emphasize this point. One connects confrontation with teaching. The other correlates confrontation as a responsibility of biblical leaders.

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you **teach and admonish** one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God”* (Colossians 3:16).

*“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who are working hard among you, those who are **guiding you in the Lord and confronting you in order to help you change**”* (1 Thessalonians 5:12, JNT).

- Do you have a difficult time confronting people who need to be admonished? Most people do, but don't let that be an excuse. It's part of loving one another!

Keep Bitterness Out!

Do you wonder why so many prayers go unanswered? Think about this: People who cling to their idols of pet sin are *walking in wickedness!* How many who call themselves “Christian” are blatantly entertaining sinful

actions and attitudes yet presumptuously believing God doesn't mind—after all, those sins are all “under the blood!”

Hard to believe? Sadly, sins of the heart are as rampant among the church as among the worldly. As Barna's research reveals, there is no difference!

You'll probably discover that the most common hindrance to answered prayer among Christians is *bitterness*. If you allow it to go unchallenged, bitterness will send out shoots of unforgiveness that will defile the hearts of all those in your extended spiritual family.

In *Pastoring By Elders* we discussed the importance of confronting bitterness. Because of the insidious and widespread nature of this sin, a review is helpful.

As an elder in your fellowship of families, you are a *gatekeeper*. You're responsible to keep out wolves in sheep's clothing and anything else that might destroy your fellowship or hinder your prayers. A bitter person who refuses to repent remains unforgiven by our heavenly Father: *“But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”* (Matthew 6:15). Sympathy for the bitter helps no one.

Bitterness is like the sin of pride, and a proud person is resisted by our Father (1 Peter 5:5). A person's bitterness is a strong indicator that they have no appreciation of their own huge sin burden for which our Father is offering to forgive *them*. Their arrogance to cling to their bitterness nullifies Jesus' sacrifice for them on the cross.

Bitterness in your midst is a destroyer as well: *“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to **cause trouble and defile many**”* (Hebrews 12:15). Bitter people influence others to hold on to their own resentment, unforgiveness and begrudging attitudes. If you don't confront

bitterness, your whole extended spiritual family will be defiled by it.

Before you ever welcome someone into your home fellowship family, check them out spiritually. In *Pastoring By Elders* we recount the woe we went through with our sheep flock when we failed to fully examine a ewe we'd been given. She had highly contagious foot rot. It took months with many hurting sheep before we finally eradicated that disease.

Gatekeeping: A Lost Responsibility

If a man wants to join your fellowship family, the elder(s) should meet with him as often as need be before he becomes part of the fellowship. Find out about his relationship with his father — the most common source of bitterness. If he has unresolved bitterness, ask him to deal with it biblically before he joins your extended spiritual family. A bitter man:

- will never come under biblical authority as God commands.
- will never properly exercise authority as God intends.
- will never let other men get close enough to him to exercise relational accountability.
- will make a mess of his marriage, repeatedly depending on you to pull him out of one marital impasse after another.

If a woman wants to join your fellowship family, the elder(s) and their wives should meet with her as often as need be before she joins in fellowship. Find out about her relationship with her father — the most common source of bitterness. If she has unresolved bitterness, ask her to deal with it biblically before she joins your extended spiritual family. A bitter woman:

- will never come under biblical authority as God commands.
- will resort to control and manipulation to get her way, agitating others in the family.
- will never let other women get close enough to her to exercise relational accountability.

- will make a mess of her marriage, repeatedly depending on you to pull her out of one marital impasse after another.

Your fellowship family will never press on into all our Father desires if bitterness is camped in your midst. As a leader it will wear on you, perhaps even driving you into discouragement or depression.

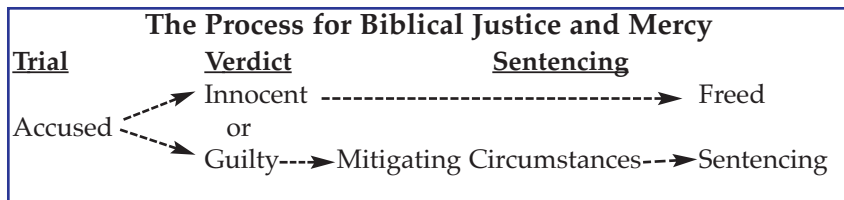
Confront the Hellenistic Perversion of Grace

One of the children of Hellenism is psychology. In the last 60 years psychology has replaced the Bible as the method of choice in helping people throughout the Nicolaitan system. In many segments of Nicolaitanism, people are more concerned with their *feelings* than they are with picking up their cross and following Jesus. In the last half century it's become increasingly more difficult to convey the need for *repentance* so that believers can leave their sins behind, especially when it comes to bitterness.

Psychology has given us words like "abused", "victim", and "dysfunctional family" as brands that minimize personal responsibility to repent and to forgive. An underlying sense of "victimization" makes it all the harder for followers of Jesus to mature in the full responsibility that walking in Jesus calls for.

I've taken several law courses over the years, both at the undergraduate and graduate level. I began to see the inroads that psychology was making in the Justice System. People who committed crimes were no longer regarded as "guilty" but rather as *victims of poor upbringing*. The penitentiaries which were supposed to mete out the penalty for crimes against society have been renamed "Correctional Institutions". However, without the recognition of personal guilt, little gets "corrected".

Police officers today admit their underlying fear of young felons because they have *no remorse for their crimes!* How do you change a person who has no sense of guilt



your guilt with a myriad of excuses, you never grasp how great a sin burden you have brought to the cross. Consequently, you never live in gratefulness for the

for the pain they've inflicted on another human being? Until sin becomes utterly sinful in your *heart*, you experience no guilt.

About 30 years ago I was following closely the trial of a doctor who had murdered his wife. For the first time I saw mitigating circumstances being introduced into the *trial phase* of the proceedings. Up until that time the trial phase had solely involved introduction of evidence to determine the guilt or innocence of the defendant.

If a person was found guilty, then mitigating circumstances could be introduced in the *sentencing phase*. For example, say two men are found guilty of stealing from a grocery store in two unrelated trials. The first is found to have 4 starving children because he's been out of work for 2 years on disability. The other stole to support his drug habit. In sentencing, should these circumstances be taken into consideration? By all means! Our Lord does that with us too. But first, guilt or innocence must be established.

Bear with me a moment, because the truth of what I'm sharing will make all the difference in your ability to help people in your care truly repent when God requires it.

Last week in the news a girl was found innocent of murdering her father. Oh, she admitted killing him! Why was she declared innocent? Because she convinced the jury that he was "abusive." Brothers and sisters, that girl is *guilty* of murdering her father. She's *not* innocent of the deed! But *after* she's been found guilty, mitigating circumstances that affected her actions can be introduced so that she might not even receive punishment.

How does this impact Christians? Throughout the Nicolaitan church system, people consider mitigating circumstances *before* they come to grips with their own personal guilt for their sins. If you cover over

punishment Jesus took on your behalf. If your sin is not *utterly sinful* to you, then your appreciation of His forgiveness is never *utterly grateful*!

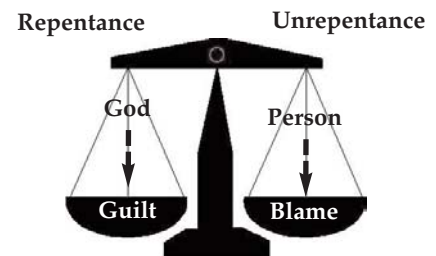
Let's go back to the bitter person who is trying to join your home fellowship family. As you talk with him about his bitterness, he tells you, "My Dad was an angry alcoholic." That statement may very well be true, but he's been harboring sinful unforgiveness in his own heart! He has deliberately chosen to hold onto bitterness rather than to forgive from his heart. For the protection of the sheep and for this man's own well-being in relationship with God, you need to gatekeep unless he repents. You can offer to help him man to man, but his bitterness would poison the true fellowship that is shared in your faith family.

No one likes to face the guilt of their own sin. Every one of us will try to balance our guilt for what we've done with blame. Blame excuses self and puts someone else at fault. Adam blamed Eve, and your kids blame each other: "I socked her because she wouldn't share her ice cream with me."

If the brothers and sisters in your care refuse to repent from the sins they're entertaining, your prayers as a faith community will go unanswered by our Father.

It doesn't matter if someone's father was Adolf Hitler! Help them

to see the guilt of *their* sins without any blame or excuse on their part. This process is vital, especially if you're going to help divorced people in particular live free from the sting of divorce.



Using mitigation before guilt is established is a sinister barrier to your mandate in one-anothering to “confront in order to help those in your care to change.” The propensity to *blame others* has led to the broadly accepted teaching in Nicolaitanism of “greasy grace” — “My husband (elder, parents, family in Jesus) has no right to confront me about my sins. I don’t *feel bad* about what I’m doing. The *Holy Spirit* will change me.”

The Holy Spirit give us grace, the *desire and power to do God’s will*. But He does this *after* we repent. The Bible teaches that one child of God holds another accountable to repent when that person refuses to hear the convicting voice of the Spirit. Isn’t that what Matthew 18:15-20 is all about? “*If your brother sins, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over...*” Restoration of fellowship in Jesus should be a great enough motivation for us to go to our brother!

Interrelational Discipleship

An elder is *not* the hub of a wheel with **all the spokes** leading to him! There is no biblical justification for one-man rule, nor is any elder more preeminent than the next. Preeminence opens a man up to satanic attack — he’s in Satan’s cross-hairs!

In the Hebraic understanding of God-given authority, each man gives each man respect because he is the head of a household. Elders never supplant a man’s home authority, because his authority comes from God. Their *own* authority in the faith community was gained through wise enactment of their authority in their own families. By teaching the biblical applications that guided their own lives, elders help other men to walk more maturely in Christlikeness.

One of the prime ways you can help is assisting each man to establish appropriate application of God’s Word to all areas of his life. These biblically-based life applications are called “*halakhahs*.” [For more on this subject and how to develop your own *halakhahs*, see our book, *Christian Hala-*

khahs. Biblical applications are like rocks in a fortress wall protecting your family and faith community.]

Final Exhortation

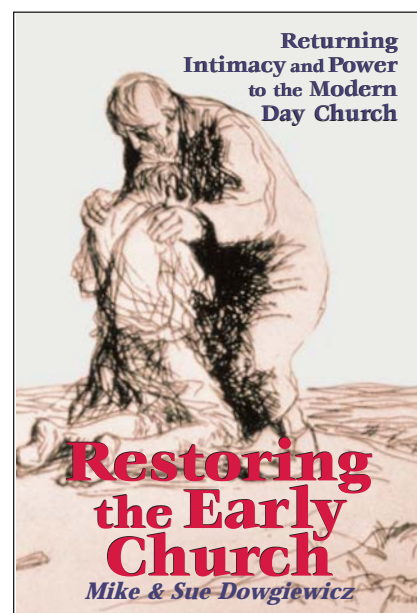
If you yearn to join our Father in what He is restoring to His people, you must flee what He hates and wars against — Nicolaitanism! Prayerfully seek Him and discern for yourself if what we have written in this article is the truth He wants you to live by. We firmly believe that as our Father keeps His promise to the Patriarchs and restores the Israelites back to their land, He is showing His mercy to us Gentiles by revealing what the true Church that Jesus is building looks like.

My wife and I recognize the divine way in which we were drawn to Israel, and the revelation our Father gave us to come back to the US with a prophetic message. As we finished our research on the early Church, we could feel our Father’s sorrow, especially over the children of divorce in the Nicolaitan Church in the US. Their pain and tears were hurting His heart.

After we arrived back in the United States with what He told us to share, we discovered a painting by Forain that depicted the return of the Prodigal Son. It captured the sense of longing our Father has to embrace His children. He told us to call our prophetic mes-

sage the Hebraic Restoration. It represents His means to enable each of us to live in intimacy with Him.

Yes, you are going to find increased responsibility both to your heavenly Father and



to other people. Nicolaitanism demands no more of you than attending a baseball game. Now you are embarking on a *way of life* that pleases our Father. This requires spiritual intimacy with Him and others in a home fellowship of connected family in Jesus. You'll need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to be able to live in a manner that reflects the love of Jesus to all you meet.

Our Lord warned Lot to get out of Sodom and Gomorrah, and He is warning you now to get out of Nicolaitanism. Leave, and don't

look back with regret. Thank our Father for revealing His will to you, and ask for the Holy Spirit to guide you in acquiring that which once made your spiritual forefathers who first trusted Jesus relationally intimate and spiritually powerful.

This is the only way you're going to hear a "Well done!" as you hear your name proclaimed in front of the Hosts of Heaven!

"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:17a).