

Yeshua

MISHPACHAH

A NEWSLETTER TO THE FAMILY OF JESUS FROM RESTORATION MINISTRIES

The Hebraic family is not simply an individual or private matter. Rather, it is an institution in which the whole community has a stake. Thus, the Hebrew word "mishpachah," meaning family, not only refers to parents and children, but to the whole extended family worldwide in the body of "Yeshua"— our Jesus.

Dear Friends,

George Whitefield was a great preacher of the 1700's, credited with fanning the flame of the Great Awakening. I first learned about him some 20 years ago while attending seminary. I actually rappelled off the famous rock in Annisquam, Mass. on which he often climbed to preach to thousands!

Recently, I came across an article written by Mr. Whitefield entitled "The Almost Christian." I was intrigued that he faced the same hindrances to people *fully following Jesus* as Sue and I face as we share the message of Restoration.

The underlying condition of an 'almost Christian' is that he wavers between two opinions. The prophet Elijah encountered this same problem in Israel and declared before the people at Mount Carmel, "*How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him*" (1Kings 18:21). It's evident that wavering between two opinions is an ancient problem.

Permit me to paraphrase some of Whitefield's insights: "*The man stuck between two opinions has an inclination toward [Jesus], but he is cautious lest he go too far...He prays for God to reveal His will, but that the Lord will not ask too*

much of him...He is a person who sees his religion as a set of religious forms and practices, but he is a stranger to a deep relationship with his Lord...He is 'negatively good' in that by not doing anyone harm he is serving God...He gives to his church but does nothing to personally reach out to the poor and hurting...He goes to Promise Keepers meetings and wears the PK paraphernalia, but his neighbors and co-workers see nothing of the loving self-sacrifice and holiness of Jesus in his life."

Who Are The 'Almost Christians?'

Whitefield cited five factors which identify an 'almost Christian.'

1. 'Almost Christians' begin with a **false notion of religion**. They see themselves as "*cultural Christians*", not as *followers of Jesus*. (Have you heard the phrase "It's the *Christian* thing to do"?) Their religious life is seen as a set of practices and beliefs. On the other hand, believers who are courageous enough to follow Jesus gratefully recognize a thoroughly inward change of nature, a participation in the sufferings of Jesus. Through the so-called "false gospels" of today, the 'almost Christian' is promised benefits and prosperity with *no personal cost*.

2. So many 'almost Christians' have an inordinate concern or **fear about what others think**. In a prior letter we shared that "*Fear of man will prove to be a snare*" (Pro.29:25). Jesus, however, tells us whom to fear, "*I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him*" (Luke 12:4,5). In other words, **FEAR GOD!** [And when was the last time you heard a teaching on THAT?!!]

Initially, many who put their trust in Jesus begin to taste the divine life. But churches, rather than strengthening this intimacy, steal the intensity of the relationship through programs and activities. The more zealous the converts, the busier they get. Isn't there a phrase, "10% of the people do 90%, of the work in the church"?

So many congregations today are numerically oriented, "nickels and noses." The quality of relationship Jesus desires takes too much humility. Concerned with their own image, the leaders of many faith communities look to the big names, the famous, those with large congregations. They are

Equipping the Church to Go Back for its Future

unable to commend those who² he was going to help me suffer for it! Fortunately, I had 3 enlisted brothers with whom I prayed and shared fellowship.

After several months at sea, one night I returned from my watch to my stateroom at 4 AM. There in my room were three of the ship's officers. "Would you teach us about Jesus?" In a few weeks they grew courageous enough to sit with me at meals. The verbal abuse they took from the other officers only served to strengthen their faith as it had mine. Blessed indeed are they who are persecuted even in a small way for His Name's sake!

Jesus still addresses and condemns such "horizontal" focus today when He says, "*How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?*" (John 5:44); and, "*Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God*" (John 12:42,43).

I gave my life to follow Jesus in 1977 at the beginning of a ten-month cruise while I was in the Navy. Prior to my conversion, I was the tennis partner of the ship's captain. Afterward he ditched me, not because my game changed but because he felt uncomfortable just being in my presence! While at sea, none of the other officers would associate with me. The captain had stigmatized me with everyone. Believe me, it gets awfully lonely eating by yourself at sea day after day!

The senior watch officer put me on the midnight watch and refused to rotate my watches with the other officers. He told me that if I was a Christian, then

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In this past year Sue and I have heard this fear of man, even from seminary and Bible college professors: "What you two have written is true, but there isn't a clergy person in our denomination who'd have the courage to try it."

3. Whitefield offers another reason why so many are 'almost Christians': the overpowering **love of money**. Do you remember the story of the rich young man who wanted to know what he must do to inherit eternal life? Now, to me, that's probably the most important question of all. Jesus answered him, "*You know the commandments: Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.*'

'Teacher,' he declared, 'all these I have kept since I was a boy.' Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack,' he said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' At

this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth" (Mark 10:19-22). Jesus had zeroed in on that man's true idol, his love of money.

Jesus concluded this whole exchange with this indictment: "*How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!*" (v.23). The more you have of this world's materials, the more you must be willing to lay on the altar for His purposes! We read recently that 42% of Americans had investments in the stock market. Ask yourself: Have you been more consumed with your investments [or in the coming Y2K situation] than in your concern for people's souls?

Years ago I worked for a Christian organization in Massachusetts. On the board of trustees were many rich, prominent businessmen from Boston. In my interaction with them I discovered a theological view I'd never heard before: "God obviously loves us more than he does poor people. That's why He's blessed us with such great wealth." As you can imagine, it was very difficult to be around such arrogance and disdain for others.

Well aware of the insidiousness of idolizing money, Paul warned Timothy, "*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs*" (1 Timothy 6:10). But he goes on to encourage him, "*But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the*

faith. Take hold of the eternal life³ to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:11-13).

4. On par with the love of money is the **love of pleasure** which keeps people 'almost Christians'. Paul warned his young friend Timothy about this along with a host of destructive attitudes when he told him, "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them" (1 Timothy 3:2-5). Even after listing the evils they entertain, Paul could tell us that these people have a "form of godliness"—they play at being religious!

How can one ever conquer the love of pleasure? How can we ever embrace the words of Jesus, "if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matt. 16:24,25). The cross is a "death to self" stake in your

heart! Your life of self-will is exchanged for His life of loving trust and obedience.

None of us can do this without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit! We need to cast aside our fleshly desires and cravings, and to walk by the Spirit of God. If we love anything or anyone more than Jesus, we are not worthy of Him. So many 'almost Christians' cannot love Jesus because they have never received the Spirit of God. Others who have received the Spirit fail to live by the Spirit. Jesus understood the difference the Spirit makes when He emphasized, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63).

5. Whitefield adds a last factor that hinders so many 'almost Christians': the **insatiable need for novelty**. People love new things. In the US we are more an entertainment-oriented than a work-oriented culture. It would not be far-fetched to say of Americans, "We work so that we can play." The western Church reflects this as much as the culture does. Just look at any of the advertisements in any Christian magazine. In the last decade a new phrase has shown up on many of the conference advertisements, "signs and wonders to follow." What presumption to assume that our Lord will bless any gathering of so-called Christians no matter what their message or motive!

Why do so many enjoy TV sitcoms? Can it be that they're geared to the maximum amount of time people are able to pay

attention to today?

Several years ago when Sue was a kindergarten teacher at a Christian school, she made this observation: "It's so difficult to teach kids who watch Sesame Street. No teacher can keep up with the constant change of attention-grabbers they use to keep a child's interest!"

The same can be said for Christians. The large churches in most cities are competing for the same people through their investments in, and their promotion of, their worship teams and multitudes of programs. We see it here in Colorado Springs. There is minimum growth through salvations. Many congregations that are growing are doing so by draining others, inheriting attendees stimulated by the latest attractions. This is the trend reported all around the US—a "slosh" among believers from church to church.

Let me remind you of an important biblical fact: Our relationship with Jesus is our entry into an eternal covenant. It is a costly relationship—it cost Him His life. It will cost you your identity as an independent, self-sufficient vessel. Ask yourself, isn't an 'almost Christian' really a 'non Christian'?

We'd like to give you some thoughts to consider for yourself, your family, and others with whom you have intimate fellowship.

1. When Christians *grumble* in the middle of adversity, by what false notions or misconceptions may they have been duped? When was the last time you prayerfully read 1 Peter and identified with the

sufferings of Jesus and with⁴ His suffering people worldwide?

- Paul tells Timothy, *"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Tim. 3:12). In what ways are you being persecuted? In what ways do you try to avoid persecution? [We heartily commend to you the organization *Voice of the Martyrs*, which keeps followers of Jesus abreast of the specific suffering family members of Jesus around the world. Contact them at POB 443, Bartlesville, OK 74005-0443, email: thevoice@vom.usa.org]
- Peter warns us, *"Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever!"* (2 Pet. 3:17,18). Who are the lawless men? How would you recognize them? Do you think that law is opposite to grace? Do you subconsciously consider the 1050 commands of the New Testament to be "holy suggestions" rather than the Spirit-empowered righteous life that pleases our Father?
- Throughout a large portion of the Church today, there is a misconception that our Father is more pleased with

our corporate worship of Him than with our daily obeying His commandments out of love. We are falsely told that we can "enter His presence" only through a worship that is somehow separate from our daily walk. This smacks of the Gnostic heresy that a certain few are able to achieve a mysterious intimacy with God that is not available to all followers of Jesus. Moses told the Israelites, *"The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive...And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness"* (Deut. 6:24,25).

Jesus teaches His followers, *"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him"* (John 14:21). How do you see the balance of keeping His commandments and worshiping Him? How is your love for God seen in how you live?

Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz

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