



Awakenings

::::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries ::::: Volume 5 ::::: Issue 5 :::::

Loading People Down With Endless Religious Cargo

by Herb Montgomery

One of the experts in the law answered Him, “Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.” Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.” (Luke 11:45-46)

Let me first say thank you for taking the time to pick this month’s issue of *Awakenings* up and read this article. I’d like to share with you some thoughts I shared last month in our podcast regarding Jesus statement in the above verse.

Jesus has, up to this point in the passage, been directing His comments toward the Pharisees, but now we see Him changing His focus from the Pharisees to the Scribes. The Scribes were the law experts, the ones who interpreted the law for the Pharisees.

To begin, notice that out of anything Jesus could have focused on, that this is what Jesus chose to point out first:

“You load people down with burdens they can hardly carry.”

Greek word here is *phortiz*, which was the verb used for loading boxes or cargo on ships. In other words, you are loading people down with thing after thing. Here’s another thing you need to do and here’s another and here’s another. Here’s an “ought,” here’s a “should,” here’s a “gotta do.” Imagine if you will, a person to be a cargo ship, and all their religious community’s endless religious rules are the cargo that they find themselves weighed down under.

Jesus was ministering in the midst of a religious environment that made following God *difficult*, while according to the words of Jesus, it was supposed to be easy.

By contrast, Jesus said, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

This is such a misunderstood subject. And before we dive into it, I want to just add at the beginning that if you find in your heart the tendency to lean more toward answering that following God IS difficult, then I would submit that to whatever degree we find this feeling inside of us, to that same degree we have not yet truly seen the God Jesus came to reveal to us.

But I can already hear some out there bristling, “what about the struggle with the flesh?” If I can be open and honest for a second, too many times, I’m convinced, we misunderstand this too. The flesh dies in the light of the Cross. Our self-centered bent becomes eradicated in us to the degree that we live in the light of the Cross. Now, of course this does not happen overnight and, yes, it is especially experienced in stages or degrees, but listen: The struggle should not be to fight the flesh, but to fight to keep our eyes on the love that streams from the cross of Calvary so the flesh remains dead! Wouldn’t it make sense to—instead of always going around wrestling with the fruit of our self-centeredness—to rather simply cut it off at the root? Doesn’t it make more sense to, instead of wrestling from the outside in, to go right to the heart of the matter and cut it off on the inside at its very core? This is what Paul wrote happens inside of us when we genuinely grasp what Calvary is whispering to us—the love that’s in God’s heart for us all.

The love of Christ controls us, having concluded that one died for all, we can



reason that therefore all died; and He died for all so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for He who died and rose again on their behalf. (2 Corinthians 5:14)

Did you catch it? “No longer live for ourselves.”

Does this mean we should never wrestle? No, I’m not saying that. What I am saying is that the more preoccupied we are with the revelation of God’s heart of radical, self-sacrificial, other-centered love as revealed through the cross of Calvary, the *easier* our internal wrestling will be. Listen, none of us have arrived. But what I have found in my own experience is that when I, in my heart, am focusing on God’s heart for me, when I cease to be so preoccupied with getting God in my heart and I focus instead on seeing how deeply I am in the heart of God, every sacrifice I am called to make for the kingdom ceases to be a sacrifice and becomes a delight, every duty I am called to for the sake of the kingdom ceases to be a duty and becomes a pleasure.

Now again, Jesus was ministering in the midst of a religious environment that made following God *difficult*, while according to the words of Jesus, it was supposed to be easy.

What we have here are two contrasting realities. One reality is love based, versus the other which is rules based.

Paul’s life of living for the kingdom was, looking at it from the outside, *hard*! But if you were to look at what was going on in Paul’s heart in response to Jesus, you would see, really, it was the easiest thing in the world for him to love God *back* because Paul’s image of God was One who was so unselfish, so other centered, so beautiful. Paul could give up all, regardless of the cost to himself and with no thought of what he may have received in return, for this kind of God.

Those who follow the opposite, which is a rules based paradigm, are really in a spiritual prison where they receive life, value or security from either the rightness of their beliefs or the rightness of their behavior. That’s what makes it hard. No matter how right their beliefs are or how many rules they have piled up on top of each other, it just never seems to be enough. This kind of religiosity is very hard.

I’ve also noticed that those who tend to degrade following Jesus really to a set of rules usually characterize the rightness of their behavior as “I don’t listen to this type of music,” “I don’t eat these certain foods,” “I don’t wear this type of clothing or adornment,” and the like. (Now I can already hear it, some of you do have strong opinions about what is right or wrong in these categories, and listen to me, *I do too*, but hear what I am saying.)

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Life Unlimited**Wheeling, WV, July 8-16, 2011**

The Life Unlimited Series this last July went well. The Wheeling SDA Church in Wheeling WV is a very small church, but a church with a large heart. Evangelism in this church is done on a small scale, but with lots of enthusiasm. There is a small homeschool group in this church that is made up of families of different denominational persuasions, and it was here, in this group that we had our largest attendance from those who were guests visiting the little church there in Wheeling during this series. As I said before, I feel the meetings went well. It was a one week series with two weekends, one on each end. The goal of this series is to help people begin to experience the life and life more abundant that Jesus spoke of coming to give us through encountering and embracing Jesus own view of the Character of God as revealed through the lens of Jesus' ministry and teachings. Each presentation was rewritten and updated again as this series seems to be the one which is always changing the most. I will say that we are producing a new series currently entitled *The JESUS Seminar*, which will most likely make the *Life Unlimited* series obsolete as our evangelistic series here at RHM. We are excited about this change and will keep you posted as we present this new series this October in Honolulu, HI. This will be it's first "run", so please keep the series in October in your prayers. I have high hopes and am truly excited.

Let me share one last thought about the series in Wheeling. I am more and more convinced, each time I give a series that is geared for visitors to our Adventist churches rather than those who attend on a weekly basis, that what makes the biggest difference in who comes out to the series is directly dependent on how effectively those we invite feel *loved* by us. It's more than simply knowing someone, or having a "relationship" of some sort with them. Just knowing someone and placing a piece of literature in their hand about some upcoming series just doesn't cut it. For a series to be truly successful it must be only a part of much larger efforts. It can't be just another "program". It must be only one element of a more pervasive overarching "lifestyle" within a church of making the community around the church feel loved by us, be somewhat already exposed to us through our reaching out to them to help and to bless them. If this sense of being loved by us is not present, we simply will not have the credibility that's needed to help post moderns in our day see God, not as Christianity has portrayed Him per say, but as Jesus revealed Him to be through the cross of Calvary. We are now living in the information age, and simply putting out more information in an already "information" saturated environment won't make a large difference. What the world needs now is the same thing it needed in Jesus day, a revelation of God's character of Love revealed first through His people. (It doesn't mean our unique teachings are not important, it simply means that our unique teachings must become only lenses through which other's encountered a different picture of God.)

Love, not accurate information alone, a sense of truly being loved by us is the element I feel too many times our efforts are really missing. What each of the guests who came out to this series in Wheeling had in common, was, that before they knew what we believed, they were convinced that, by us, they were loved. They were convinced that we were in complete agreement with what the Cross of Calvary was saying about each of them. That we believed and agreed with the infinite worth that Calvary ascribed to each one of them and we were there primarily, to help and to bless them.

When people feel loved, they'll come out to a series we are offering.

Thank you for your support. We could not do what we do without your participation. Together we are lightening the globe with the revelation of God's character of love, centered in the ministry and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Hollister SDA Church**Hollister, CA, August 12-13, 2011**

Let me share a heart-felt "thank you" to all of you who were praying for this event. We are still getting emails from those who attended sharing what a blessing they received. I had never been to Hollister before, and so, usually on a first-time visit, I try and share the usual concepts that I believe are foundational to understanding the Gospel and arriving at a healthy picture of our Heavenly Father. But this time, I felt moved to share something that has been a burden on my heart over the last couple months. I'm happy to say that the recording took and we'll be releasing Friday night's presentation as our sermon of the month for September.

For all of you who traveled to Hollister for this weekend, it was so good to see each one of you again. And for those of you who actually live there in Hollister, it was a tremendous privilege to meet each of you as well. Thank you for the invitation to come to your church and please don't hesitate if we at RHM can be of any future service to you as you seek to share the message of God's character of love with today's world in a relevant and meaningful way.

Keep building the kingdom.

Kingsway College, TV Interview and Upcoming Events**Kingsway College, TV Interview and The Jesus Dialogue
Oshawa, ON, CA, September 8-9, 2011**

Hello everyone! I want to give you a couple updates of recent events and let you know about two upcoming events as well.

First, for all of you who were praying for the TV interview on September 21, I feel really good about the recording and can't wait for it to begin airing. Thank you so much for your prayers. I experienced a special clarity in my thoughts on the topic, and the words just seemed to flow. It felt very natural for television, and I'm looking forward to the feedback we receive when folks start watching it. Again, this wasn't religious television per say, but a WV Public TV interview between myself and a Doctor here in WV on the subject of how a God could truly be good when life on this planet is so filled with suffering. We are very thankful for the opportunity to share through this venue and for each of you who were lifting me up in prayer during its filming, thank you.

Second, let me share with you how my recent trip to Kingsway College went. It was exactly a year ago that I originally was there. Many of the students remembered me, and quite a few of those who had signed out for the weekend actually came to the presentations of their own volition as well. I felt that was a very positive sign of the effect of seeing God for who He really is. Once you taste Him, something inside you resonates and whispers, "This is what I was made for." It's more than religion—it's love.

I received a lot of good feedback from quite a few adults in the area who have been blessed by RHM as well. I have so many stories from the weekend, I can't possibly share them all. I obtained a great sermon illustration as I crossed the Canadian/U.S. border that I think I'll use in the upcoming series in Hawaii, contrasting the difference between following the person Jesus rather than the religion of Christianity. Keep an eye out for it. But the experience that touched my heart the most was a "widows mite" story of a ten-year-old little girl, who was so touched by what she was hearing about Jesus that she came up to me afterwards and asked whether she could make a donation. She asked me to hold out my hand, and in my palm, she placed all she had: two nickels, a dime, and 6 or 7 pennies. She looked up at me and said, "I want others to hear about this Jesus." I was so touched, honestly, to tears. It was the kingdom in action. God's love, which awakens the desire to live for others rather than ourselves, knows no bounds. It knows no culture, no gender, no race, and absolutely no age. It reaches all.

Thank you for praying for this special weekend with the high school-aged young people of Kingsway College of Oshawa, ON. God showed up and together we were all blessed by the revelation of His love in a fresh and relevant way.

Lastly, I want to share that, beginning soon (October 7), we will be launching a new series entitled *The Jesus Dialogue*, which comes out of an experience I had with a gentleman on an airplane who shared, "I think

there is a God, I know I'm not interested in Christianity, but I'm intrigued by this person named Jesus." I assured him that this is all it takes, and we began discussing the picture of God we get from Jesus versus today's modern religions, including Christianity itself. It was enlightening for my friend, and it was revolutionary for me personally. That conversation gave birth to a new series to which we can invite those in our community, in hopes of sharing with others, and seeing more deeply for ourselves, the radical revelation of God's other centered, self-sacrificial love. In truth, I am becoming more and more convinced that the single greatest question we can ever answer for ourselves is "What is my picture of God?" Everything stems from and depends on the answer.

Please continue lifting this series up in prayer over the next few days, as we are in the final stages of preparation.

My desire, my only desire, for this series in Oahu, is that the folks of Honolulu will simply enter into a deeper encounter with the One who coined Himself as the Way to a right picture of God and His character of love, the Truth about God and His character of love, and life of God lived out of that character of love in human flesh, so we could experience it in its life-transforming power.

Please keep the series beginning in Honolulu on October 7 (*The Jesus Dialogue*) in your prayers. And thank you for your support..

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It is much more attainable through reliance on our own willpower not to eat certain foods, not to listen to certain music, and not to wear certain attire than it is to actually love your enemies, give all your possessions to the poor, and throw parties in our homes for those who are to a large degree marginalized by our society (see Luke 14:12-14). Only a love based reality will produce these. In a rules based reality these are not only not produced, they are impossibility. Let me explain this too.

Because these folks are receiving self worth, value, or eternal security from the rightness of their behavior, characterized by externals, there is a tendency with many, sometimes without their even realizing it, to belittle what it means to follow Jesus to a level that they themselves can reach with simply the strength of their own will power. They can do it. It's hard. But it's just hard enough to give them a sense of value and worth for actually achieving that behavior, but it's not so hard that they can't do it. But when looked at honestly, what I eat, what I listen to, and what I wear are a breeze! These are actually the very things that people in our secular world do quite easily. Watching your diet is a secular health trend right now. Some folks actually prefer one music already over another. And I've noticed in my area, even folks who aren't religious are very simple or humble in their appearance, and none of this is for religious reasons at all.

Now consider for a moment a love based reality. When you truly grasp what Jesus actually was teaching, Jesus lifts the standard so much higher than mere externals. But then He also shows us such an incredible love that we find ourselves genuinely desiring to live this life of other-centered love. We begin to witness it actually coming from, not ourselves, but the strange work that Jesus himself is doing in our innermost heart and it's ... easy.

Again, we have two realities. One of endless rules centered around externals. This paradigm actually does damage to people's perception—both within religious communities and without—of what it really means to follow Jesus. These types of religious environments burden their adherents with "here's an 'ought,'" "here's a 'should,'" "here's a 'gotta do.'" They load people down and they exhaust them.

Instead Jesus calls us to live in love. (Ephesians 5:1,2) To live in a way that on the outside, to the natural heart, looks impossible, but through the revelation of God's love for us, changes us from the inside out and makes it all easy.

In summary, what Jesus begins with in rebuking the Scribes in this passage is condemning religious environments that simply want to look good or holy by having a people who look good, according to their external standards, so they give them all these things to "carry." They simply load people down and exhaust people with thing after thing after thing and don't do a thing to help people carry it all. Environments like these tend to care more about religious rules than people. They pile on the rules even though people are dying, they tend to control people with their rules, and ultimately they tend to exhaust people.

By contrast, Jesus, lifts the standard while at the same time gives rest to people through empowering them by the revelation of His self abandoning love for them. Again, instead of exhausting those He came in contact with endless religious, external, rules, He empowered them through the revelation of His love for them and changed them from the inside out.

We, too, then as followers of Jesus must begin to create religious environments where people feel genuine *rest and empowerment* for their souls: environments that, through the same revelation of God that we find in Jesus, empower people to embrace a life of other-centered love; environments that, through the revelation of who God really is (a right picture of God) and what dwells in His heart for you, genuinely empower people to live out God's radical other-centered love. In light of what Jesus so strongly said to this Scribe, environments that no longer go about loading people down with thing after thing; but are governed by love and love alone. We must begin to create religious environments that seek be a living corporate demonstration of God Himself.

Thank you so much, once again for taking time to read this month's *Awakenings*.

In light of God's indiscriminant love (Matthew 5:44-45) this month, may you too love like the sun shines and love like rain falls. Love like Christ, and together may we form communities where this love empowers others to embrace God's love as our way of doing of life together.

I love you guys. We'll see you next month.

Herb

R H M Testimonials

I want you let you know how much I appreciate you and your work and your ability to make the Gospel so plain, simple, and clear. Thank you. – **DW**

Thank you so much for your incredible ministry. We have been blessed so much. – **NE**

Thank you so much for sharing the Good News of our Father's love with us. Your message is truly from God and what I believe is a message our church needs so desperately at this hour. I'm sharing

your materials with others too. You can count on our support so this message may spread even further. God bless you as you work for Him. – **SP**

I have been listening to your sermons, they have had a profound effect on me. I just want to say thank you. – **MN**

Absolutely stunning insight . . . I just finished listening to all of your podcasts and the series at Hollister, CA . . . Thank you – **DW**

Sermon of the Month



Freedom, Permission and Control by Herb Montgomery

The subject of harmonizing the picture many get of God from the Old Testament with the picture of God we find in the person of Jesus Christ is no simple task. It is many faceted for sure, but one that we at RHM feel is necessary for many of the folks we have met. There are so many questions and so few real answers. This month we'd like to share with you one of the attempts made by Herb at the 2010 summers' Redwood Camp Meeting. Herb wanted us to tell you, it's not in any sense exhaustive on the subject, but this presentation does give us a

few more tools to help our hearts decipher why the two pictures of God found between the testaments can be, at times, so challenging. We pray you will be richly blessed and that your relationship with God will be deepened as you listen to this month's free presentation: *Freedom, Permission, and Control* by Herb Montgomery.

Please note this title on your response card so we can send you the appropriate presentation for this issue.

From all of us here at RHM, keep living in love and go build the Kingdom.

Schedule

OCTOBER 7-22, 2011

Honolulu Central Seventh Day
Adventist Church
Honolulu, HI
808-524-1352

OCTOBER 31 - NOVEMBER 4, 2011

Fletcher Academy
Fletcher, NC
828-209-6800

NOVEMBER 11-12, 2011

Lakeport Community Seventh Day
Adventist Church
Lakeport, CA
707-263-6002

NOVEMBER 18-19, 2011

Pullman Community Worship Center
Pullman, WA
509-332-8782

JANUARY 20-21, 2012

Williston Seventh Day Adventist
Church
Williston, ND
701-580-1676

JANUARY 27-28, 2012

Grace Family Fellowship
Greenbrier, TN
615-554-7281

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