



Awakenings

"Only by love is love awakened."

::::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries :::::: Volume 6 :::::: Issue 2 ::::::

Hitch 12.15.11

by Herb Montgomery

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure — pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.
—Luke 6.37,38

This past December while spending the holidays with my extended family, many of whom are current or retired university professors and teachers, the online responses of many Christians to the death of Christopher Hitchens on December 15, 2011, were painfully brought to my attention. The one that takes the cake though was Bryan Fischer's. Fischer gained notoriety among many in 2004 when he founded the Keep the Commandments Coalition, whose purpose was to work to keep a monument of the Ten Commandments in Julia Davis Park in Boise, Idaho. I want to be careful not to disparage Fischer here. Each of us is coming from our own set of dysfunctions and life tragedies. And we must not forget that God gave up all for Fischer, which says to me that, in God's eyes, Fischer (and Hitch too) are of inestimable worth. However, Fischer's public response to Hitch's death is a classic example of the spirit I wish to address in this month's newsletter. If you can stomach it, you can find Fischer's comments on YouTube, but the line that has gotten so much publicity is, "If Hitchens is in Hell right now, he's there because God loves him." The question I was asked by my family was, "How does eternally tormenting someone for not believing in your existence and standing up for the abuse of *people* in the name of *religion* a by-product of being loved by some Supreme Being?"

I have to admit that I too was severely saddened. I believe that, if any are lost at last, it will be because God honors their freedom of choice. No loving God would find any joy in someone being forced to be with him. However, as I shared with my family, I do not share a belief in Christianity's traditional definition of Hell. I do not think it's a secret that at RHM we hold the belief that *if* any are lost in the end, we find more evidence in the scriptures that suggests these will simply be "as if they never were" (Obadiah 1:16) rather than the Middle Ages idea of eternal torment. (See the presentation *Love's Eternal Flame* on our website for more information on this.) But this is a tangent.

What I want to focus our attention on this month is the spirit in which Christianity — praise God for the few exceptions — is currently responding to its "enemies." Take a quick look at Jesus' words in the sixth chapter of Luke:



Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure — pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return (Luke 6.37,38; it would be good to read the entire chapter).

What Jesus is saying is that, regardless of the manner in which you relate to others, they will respond to you in kind. Turn Jesus' words around and look at what He is actually saying. If you are judgmental, others will be judgmental of YOU! If you possess a spirit of condemnation toward those who are not like you, they will also condemn YOU! If you feel that you are morally superior to them, they will respond by feeling that they are intellectually superior to YOU! Whatever you set in motion toward others will come back on YOURSELF! As I look at the overview of history since Jesus — and I will be the first to admit that this may be a tad oversimplified — Christianity has not always followed the teachings of Jesus. We carry His name, but our actions don't resemble His, especially when it comes to those who do not believe what we do.

I think that Voltaire's famous statement in his critique of Christianity is applicable here: "Of all religions, Christianity is without a doubt the one that should inspire tolerance most, although, up to now, the Christians have been the most intolerant of all men."

What I want you to consider this month is the following questions:

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The following is taken from our news page on our website. For more up to date news on each event involving Herb and RHM please see www.renewedheartministries.com and look under the "News" tab

Fletcher, NC

October 31–November 5, 2011

No matter how well it's done, Institutional Christianity will always produce challenges for our young people. Fletcher Academy does a great job educating its students. However, statistically speaking, those who graduate from our academies and universities still leave in droves and never look back. So when I received the invitation to spend some time at Fletcher Academy in Fletcher, NC, I was not going to say no.

Over the course of 1 week, I gave 11 presentations and was invited to teach 9 Bible classes. In my free time, I counseled students individually from 9 AM until 5 PM Monday through Friday. (I'm still in dialogue with some of these students via cell phone, e-mail and Facebook.) I love young people, and I had one shot at impacting how they see God. I pushed myself to the limit to do as much as possible to make that happen.

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Could the philosophies of our day – the naturalistic worldview, the neo-atheism, the evolutionary philosophy that rejects even a hint at any intelligent design, post-modern secularism – could these possibly exist because of our own embracing of an inaccurate picture of God and portraying that to the world through our failure to follow Jesus' teachings on love in the way that we relate to others? The church of the Middle Ages was so antithetical to the God that Jesus revealed that, today, all of these philosophies, in my estimation, are simply the backlash, the response of honest people who want to have nothing to do with a god who is the kind of person that Christian history has portrayed Him to be. Some of you may be saying, "Ok, fine, but that was those Catholics back then. We are Protestants!" But are we, as American Protestants, innocent? Are we really that different? Haven't we, too, embraced a very different picture of God, for the most part, as American Christians than what, in my opinion, Jesus actually taught? Are we, too, in our own way, failing to embrace the picture of God that Jesus came to reveal? Are we, too, failing to relate to those who believe differently from us with the same radical, self sacrificial, other centered love that Jesus died to teach us?

When I read Hitch's work, yes, I see the hostility and anger, the controversial bluntness, but I also see someone who was wounded just like the rest of us. What I also notice is that many of the reasons for which Hitch rejected a belief in God were

Honestly, right now I'm just recovering from losing my voice from pushing so hard the last three weeks. I want to thank the faculty at Fletcher Academy for dedicating this time in your busy schedule for your students. It says volumes about your desire to intellectually educate the next generation as well as equip them to want to follow Jesus.

I opened my cell phone up to the students for them to text me questions throughout the week. At each presentation, we answered a few questions. We ended the entire week with one grand free-for-all Q & A Session. The questions were probing questions and showed a true passion to understand some of the real issues that following God and believing He really is a God of love create. God was present at that Q & A for sure.

The cross section of an educational institution that responds to the content I endeavor to share always amazes me. As I traverse the landscape of faces and hearts within my mind's eye tonight as I write this update, I am overwhelmed and humbled to have been a part of God's work in these students' lives. The last night, over 140 young people came to the front of the church there in Fletcher. They responded to the picture of God we see revealed through the cross of Christ, and they desired not simply to accept Jesus as "Savior." In surrendering, they wanted to be followers of Jesus and give themselves with

the very misplaced values that Jesus Himself also opposed, and Jesus was God. This makes me stop and simply say that there is a possibility that Hitch was closer to the Kingdom in some of his opinions and thinking than many of us are willing to admit. If what Jesus taught has any bearing, then we, too, have a moral responsibility to oppose the tyrannical representation of God, but I will add that our opposition must be done in the way that Jesus taught us. We must overcome evil with good, violence with love, anger with peace. It may take God a millennium to help Hitch sort out the difference between the religious abuses of this earth's history and the truth about His character of love, but in the end, everyone, Hitch included, will be faced with one decision and one decision only. Do they want to live not a life of religion but a life of love (Ephesians 5:1,2)? When all the ugliness has been stripped away, when God and His beauty are actually seen, we may be surprised by whom we actually spend eternity as neighbors to.

As those who claim to be followers of Jesus, may we strive to love more like Jesus.

"Therefore mimic God, as children who are loved, and live the life of love . . ." (Ephesians 5:1,2)!

Keep building the Kingdom.

I love you guys,

Herb

P D A T E

the desire to be “Jesus” to the world today.

For all of you who were praying for this event to be successful, thank you. Only time will tell the lasting influence this week had on a generation that I am convinced is going to change the world. May we all come to see a picture of God that truly reflects His radical other-centered self-sacrificial love.

And to Fletcher Academy...thanks for allowing me to wear my jeans and ball cap while I preached.

Lakeport, CA

November 11-12, 2011

The Lakeport church is one of my favorites to visit. There is a lot of layperson-driven ministry that takes place in this church. I arrived on Friday with a severe sinus infection, probably the worst in my life, but thought I would be fine. Little did I know that I would completely lose my voice before the weekend was through.

Friday evening, before the presentation, I was ushered into one of the church's classrooms, where a small group was going to have prayer. It was such an encouragement to me. They shared that they were going to be praying during each presentation and that they wanted to begin the weekend by praying over me first. I was so blessed by their kindness and their commitment to what the weekend was all about.

Much of the weekend was taken from the new series, and, from all the positive feedback I received, I can say with all assurance that God's spirit was poured out and the Kingdom was enlarged as folks began to once again, through the lens of Jesus Christ, see a revelation of the Father's character of love. It was a truly blessed weekend for all.

I managed to get through two presentations before my voice just gave out. For the last two, they just simply turned the mic up, and I finished in a whisper. It gave a whole new meaning to a “still small voice.” Ha! But God blessed us in spite of it all.

I want to ask you specifically to pray for the elders of this church. They are reaching out to their community in truly humble, loving, service-oriented ways. I would characterize it as disinterested benevolence, just wanting to serve others. I met with a small group on Sunday morning before I left, and I was so encouraged by the amount of “Kingdom” I saw taking place among them. I am convinced that if we could just see the beauty of our Heavenly Father's character and allow the truth of His love to awaken in us the 54 “One Anothers” of the New Testament Church, so much more would be done in our communities to give the last revelation of God's character of love. So much damage has been done by the Christian religion. Good has been done too, but so much damage as well. My prayer is that in small kingdom ways, we can start being Jesus to our communities again, revealing to them the heart of a

Father who loves them.

Please keep this church in your prayers.

Pullman, WA

November 18-20, 2011

This is another church that I really enjoy visiting. Not only are the people so genuinely kind, but also this is the town that is home to Washington State University. This element never fails to produce a truly wonderful dynamic for the weekend. I was so impressed with the young people I met in Pullman who are attending the University. They were asking all the right questions and truly wanting to do more than just the “religious gig.” They sincerely were wanting to follow Jesus and make a difference.

The weekend included the usual discussions on apologetics that you find in university towns, but there was something very different about this weekend that I have yet to put my finger on. It was less cerebral, and more heart level, if that makes any sense. Don't get me wrong. It wasn't emotional with no reasoning whatsoever. There was the usual logic, but God's love shined through the logic and reached not just our heads, but also our hearts. It was truly a blessing to have been a part of it all.

There were also a few folks from the community that the folks in the church had been fellowshiping with and a few who simply walked in off the streets after having seen the flyer. It was a good mix from all different paradigms and walks of life. The one thing we all had in common was an interest in the event called *The Jesus Dialogue* (the weekend version).

For all those who were praying, God showed up! We discussed things such as the intellectual basis for believing that this historical Jewish carpenter in the first century is our significant clue not only to God's existence but also to understanding what this God is like. We discussed tools to sort out the differences between the Old Testament God and what we see in the teachings and ministry of Jesus. We talked about what it looks like to not only embrace Jesus' picture of God, but also what it means to follow Jesus, to take up the cross, to embrace being a living conduit for others to encounter this kind of God that we find revealed in Jesus. We ended the weekend with a presentation on the kind of God we see revealed on a cross, a discussion of the questions that arise when we claim that God is good and yet there is so much human suffering all around us, and then a free-for-all Q & A. Last, we went through an exercise in “group” repentance (an exercise I led the folks through at the end of last summer's camp meeting here in West Virginia). It too was a blessing for all who participated.

Once again, for all those who were praying for this weekend, thank you so much. I can always tell when folks are out there praying. The weekends are different, and this weekend was no exception. So many came up to me after the weekend and shared the many “aha” moments they had gone through all weekend long as our hearts began to fall more deeply into the embrace of our Father's perfect love.

He really is beautiful. If we can only see Him as He really is.

R H M Testimonials

I am so very grateful to you for allowing the Lord to work through you in this ministry, and so very grateful to God for how He has used you to help reveal a clearer picture of Him. I've listened to your sermons, some several times, most recently *The Jesus Dialogue* which blows me away with the much clearer revelation of God that I got from it...Thank you for letting Him show His love to others through you. - **M**

I've been out of the church for many years. I've been drawn back to God, and have been struggling to get a clearer picture of Him, studying & listening to almost every sermon on your site...Thanks for all you do! The Lord is working through you to His glory!! - **S**

After listening to all but the last *Jesus Dialogue* I am so excited!...Being a dyed in the wool judge of other people until hearing your messages, my prayer is that I never forget the truth of God's value of each person...and that I will love those I meet with God's love enough to see where they are coming from and what they need before I jump in with my educated "two bits". Thank you for your ministry, God has used you to change my view of Him and thus my way of thinking about just about everything! Thank you so much! P.S. Your latest e-message about "Hitch" touches me. I teach in a State College with a real mix of student ideas and backgrounds. - **L**

Sermon of the Month



Do you ever have a hard time understanding why God would intervene in some of life's situations but not others? Do you ever look at how some prayers are answered by an obvious miracle; while at the same time, other prayers are prayed and yet nothing happens and feel like it's all so arbitrary? At first sight, it seems to many that God is choosing to perform miracles in some cases but not in others, and we are simply left to guess as to why. But is

this really what's taking place? There are very few things more damaging to a person's relationship with God than having the wrong picture in regards to this subject. If you have ever wrestled with a prayer where you felt God let you down, hung you out to dry, or just plainly didn't come through for you, then this month's presentation is for you. *What About Prayer?* by Herb Montgomery

OSchedule

FEBRUARY 24 - MARCH 3, 2012

Chinook Winds
Adventist Academy
Calgary Alberta Canada
403-286-5686

MARCH 9-10, 2012

Crescent City SDA Church
Crescent City, CA
707-464-5229

MARCH 16-24, 2012

Kaneohe SDA Church
Kaneohe, HI 96744
808-247-4345

MARCH 30-31, 2012

SDA Church
Lee's Summit, MO
816-697-3772

APRIL 13-14, 2012

Northern New England
Youth Conference
(Location to be Announced)
207-797-3760

APRIL 27-28, 2012

Lafayette SDA Church
West Lafayette, IN
765-463-1221

APRIL 30 - MAY 4, 2012

Valley View School
Bluefield WV
336-707-0077

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