

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION OF SPIRIT FELLOWSHIP
(Presented by Carolyn Kendall at 1991 Intensive Summer Seminar,
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Introduction

I discovered, after reviewing papers 145 through 157 that the title of today's theme came from Paper 157--"At Caesarea-Philippi."

As Jesus and the twelve apostles traveled north on the road to Caesarea-Philippi they stopped at noontime for lunch and to rest under the shade of a mulberry tree. Their conversation centered around how the multitudes viewed Jesus. The apostles agreed that most of the people recognized him as a prophet. The superstitious believed he was John the Baptist risen from the dead. Others compared him with Moses, Elijah, Isaiah or Jeremiah. The apostles reported that a few even feared him as one who was in league with the prince of devils (1746).

Jesus listened to all of this, then rose, pointed to them, and demanded, "Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter jumped up and exclaimed, "You are the Deliverer, the Son of the living God." The eleven unanimously agreed with Peter's confession of faith. Peter frequently blurted out things before he thought but this time he got it absolutely right. Jesus approved, saying, "This has been revealed to you by my Father." The next day Jesus added, "This is a revelation of the spirit of my Father to your inmost souls" (1746-7)

Jesus then declared a truth which has been misinterpreted ever since that day: "Upon this foundation will I build the brotherhood of the kingdom of heaven. Upon this rock of spiritual reality will I build the living temple of spiritual fellowship in the eternal realities of my Father's kingdom" (1747)

Again, what was this foundation? what was this rock of spiritual reality? It was the identification of Jesus by Peter, and concurred in by the eleven apostles, that Jesus was the Son of the living God. This was the first bold acknowledgment of his divinity to his apostles. No longer was he solely the Son of Man; henceforth, Jesus was the Son of Man and the Son of God (1748).

And then speaking to all twelve apostles, not only to Peter whose nickname just happened to be "the Rock," or "Rocky", if you will, Jesus said, "To you and your successors I now deliver the keys of the outward kingdom--the authority over things temporal--the social and economic features of this association of men and women as fellows of the kingdom" (1749) Note carefully: Jesus did not give the apostles, and those who followed, dominion over spiritual things. Rather, he granted them limited authority--influence over the social and economic aspects of believers gathered together in religious fellowship. Clearly, the living temple of spiritual fellowship was something different; it was to be built upon each believer's comprehension of Jesus as the Son of God. Over this, the apostles and the later churches were to have no authority.

Jesus presented himself as the stand-in for the Father: "The Father and I are one," he said. "He who has seen me has seen the

Father" (1750). "You cannot see the spirit Father; therefore have I come into the world to show the Father to your creature eyes" (1952). Jesus is the lens in human likeness which makes visible to the material creature Him who is invisible (1857).

Throughout his ministry, the primary focus of Jesus' teachings was the Paradise Father. He transformed God from the then prevailing belief that God was only for the Hebrews, to the idea that he was also the God of gentiles, Samaritans, Greeks, and even Romans. And if this wasn't enough to confuse and confound them, he announced that he had come to bring knowledge of the Father to the individual, not to the Children of Israel (1629). Jesus portrayed god as a loving Father of each person. God was the Father of the blind man, the leper, the prostitute, the tax collector, the man, the woman and the child.

Part I. On the Personal Level

Jesus' religion is truly a personal religion. He emphasized that recognition of the existence of the heavenly Father and your sonship with the Father are fundamental. When you become secure in this knowledge, your whole life changes. You naturally begin showing forth the fruits of the spirit in your daily, routine lives. Realization of sonship is incompatible with the desire to sin (1683). Your whole life plan becomes proof to others that you are risking everything in the hope of survival and in the pursuit of finding God (1733). Jesus' most amazing proclamation was that once sonship is accepted, salvation is assured; you can take it for granted. For many people in his day that was too easy; it was like saying you could get salvation for a song. But many welcomed this reassurance. You can't buy salvation, you can't earn righteousness. But it's true, salvation is the free gift of the Father when you believe (1683).

As children, we envisioned ourselves as successful adults-- a great artist, musician; an effective teacher, perfect homemaker, executive, loving husband and father. The course we set to achieve our goals usually involved education, training, practice-- one can't become a brain surgeon without it. But what we didn't foresee were the difficulties and stresses resulting from such catastrophes as bad marriages, recessions, failing health, accidents, job losses--all unexpected and sometimes debilitating experiences.

In my office last week I counted 16 seminar brochures that arrived in the mail on self-improvement, for everyone from peon to potentate. "How to Deal Constructively With Stress," "Overcoming Your Fear of Selling," "Techniques for the Female Manager," "Effectiveness Training," "Managing Multiple Priorities," "How to Motivate Yourself and Your Co-workers," "How to Cram More Hours into the Day," etc., all very big items these days. Stress management courses do sometimes mention getting in touch with your inner self, but more often this involves using mental and physical exercises to gain emotional control, not spiritual enlightenment.

So far, I haven't encountered a course pertaining to the daily toil entitled: "How to do the Will of God in Any Earthly Occupation." The Jesus Papers are the ultimate handbook for

helping you become the best you can be. Jesus is the antidote for harmful introspection. When you are truly doing your work according to the highest truth, ennobled by love, dominated by mercy, and overflowing with fairness, then you are living according to the will of God. Its how you do your work, and what you are, and are becoming, not what you do, that matters (1732).

Jesus commended private prayer as the technique of changing your attitudes about yourself and others. Prayer even changes your attitude toward the Father (1639). He preached temperance, consistency, stability and a whole catalogue of qualities that are desirable if not carried to extremes. It is your faith that makes you secure in the kingdom, not affliction of soul nor fasting (1656).

To make progress you need problems to stimulate your minds, souls and spirits (1719). Your actual achievement today is not as important as the direction in which you are going. Are you making progress? Do you truly desire to do God's will-- which is another way of saying: Are you striving to become like God? What you are becoming day by day is more important than where you are at the moment (1653). Never get discouraged. You are human. If some of your experiences are regrettable, you will forget them eventually--even in eternity. The imperfections of the mind and appetites of the body don't measure the worth of the soul. Your destiny is conditioned by your spiritual longings (1739).

The Law of the Spirit is this: to him who has, much shall be given; but from him who has not, even that which he has shall be taken away (1689). If your aspirations are strictly material, then as you learn more about the natural world and believe less in the supernatural, faith in God tends to diminish. However, when your religion is spiritual, even greater knowledge of the physical sciences won't disturb faith in the eternal and divine (1727).

Part II. Building the Foundation within the Family, Workplace, Neighborhood, Social or Religious Group

The Family. Parents play the earliest and most important role in fostering their children's sense of spiritual fellowship. Jesus told John Mark that it is mother who provides the first impressions of the world and the universe--whether it is friendly or hostile. The human father must recognize that he bears the primary responsibility for how his children cultivate the concept of a loving heavenly Father (1922). He warned against indulgent parents who bring their own children down to delinquency (1653).

Sometimes, though, the human spirit transcends even an unfortunate home life. In the 1950s I worked for two doctors. One was a psychiatrist, Dr. Sadler, and the other was his medical associate, Dr. _____. Dr. _____ told me about her own upbringing. Her father had been stern and harsh, and demanded total submission from his wife and children. She said her parents instilled fear of all natural phenomena in the children. Acts of nature was God's punishment. One day after a thunder clap shook the building, I ran to her office and found her trembling in fear. Dr. _____ said, "My parents probably ruined me, but you know I bear them no ill will. They did the best they knew how." Not all

children are that forgiving. It's a feature of the human species that they can visualize a better life. Children aren't locked into patterns of automatic behavior. They can aspire to be better persons than their parents.

Our Relationship to Others. A thoroughly selfish creature cannot receive the unselfish glories of Paradise. Even God can't force salvation on one who chooses not to survive (1638). As believers in the Father, we cannot live in isolation. We kid ourselves if we think we can become perfect all by ourselves. The test of our spiritual progress is when we come up against all types of other human beings. Jesus assured that when we find God in our own souls we will find him in the souls of others (1733). The measure that truth seekers are drawn to us represents the measure of our truth endowment--righteousness. The extent to which we have to go with our message to the people is the measure of our failure to live the whole or righteous life, the truth-coordinated life (1726). Have you noticed that so many of the things Jesus said in these papers are yardsticks by which you can gauge your spiritual progress?

Jesus also had a checklist of righteousness: Are you good righteousness recommenders? (1740) Are you tactful with your fellows? Are you tolerant of stubborn associates? (1740) Do you love only those folks who love you? (1739) Do you hold grudges? How graceful are you in defeat? (1740) If you'd like to receive mercy, do you show mercy? Judge not that you be judged. Forgive others to enhance your realization of God's forgiveness. (1638)

Jesus had nothing good to say about anger. Your ability to maintain control of yourself is the measure of the spiritual nature to gain control of the intellectual and physical nature. Anger is inconsistent with the status of divine sonship--it drives people away instead of drawing them to you (1673).

Part III. Promoting Spiritual Truth in the World

The apostles had wonderful experiences proclaiming new truth to the multitudes. They also had a few bad days. They learned that popular acclaim is fickle and inconsistent. Religious hysteria is shallow. They found out how humans are swayed by the preacher's eloquence, and how conscience responds to emotional appeals, as the mind does to logic and reason (1722). At the Capernaum sundown healing they were disappointed to find that the appeal to emotions is transitory. The approach to the intellect alone is empty and barren. It's alright to appeal to the emotions to arrest the attention, Jesus instructed, and then to the mind to awaken curiosity, but it is only through the spirit that truth will become permanent and will multiply (1705).

People are not produced by cookie cutters. Emotional reactions are different. When dealing with individuals Jesus tailored his approach to their various natures. People do, however, tend to react uniformly to spiritual appeals because of the uniformity of the Thought Adjusters. It is only through the appeal to the Adjuster that mankind will ever attain unity and brotherhood (1672).

Jesus upheld the presentation of the diversity of personal

experience. Each apostle taught the same truth, but each man's interpretation was different (1658). Jesus was a compelling teacher, but Peter was a better preacher than Jesus (1672). The Son of God wasn't an especially systematic teacher; he pretty much winged it--played everything by ear as the occasion served (1672).

Going back to the idea of the family for a moment--Jesus had some advice about how to approach groups of human beings, whether they are a biological family or a close-knit group of friends: Said Jesus, "I come to bring peace on earth. When all in a family receive the gospel, there is peace. When some believe and others reject the gospel, division brings sorrow and sadness. Save the whole family lest your foes turn out to be those in your own household" (1682).

The Master commissioned us to work persistently toward the betterment of the human estate on earth. Intelligent application would enable mankind to overcome misery (1661). The apostles learned that providing free food does not necessarily reveal the Father or advance the kingdom; it doesn't even command loyalty. Of the 5,000 who were miraculously fed by Jesus, only 500 continued to follow him (1704).

Jesus prepared the apostles for crisis situations in two ways: 1) He subjected them to repeated rehearsals in disappointment. 2) He provided frequent testing opportunities for choosing between right and wrong. When emergencies arose, they were able to make courageous choices because of prior habitual mental attitudes and spirit reactions (1708).

Jesus restrained the apostles from making hostile attacks upon anything the people held in reverence (1710). He spoke about the religions of authority--the easy, traditional religions that provided a safe refuge (1729). The apostles were to cast off the "lethargy of tradition," the outworn systems of forms and ceremonies, passing from darkness to light (1731). They would proclaim liberty to fear-ridden souls (1710).

Erlene Green's narration at Snowmass last year of her childhood church experiences in the South struck a responsive chord in me. When I was a child, I spent every summer in Kentucky visiting my cousins and grandparents. Long about August the local Baptist church imported a preacher to conduct the revival. For six straight evenings, as we all fanned ourselves in the hot one room country church, the preacher ranted against evil and the devil. His wife pounded out songs on the piano about the blood of the lamb that was shed to save sinners. By Sunday, after the hymn singing and "amens" were over, the invitation to the congregation to "come forward" always brought four or five repentant souls. The alcoholic and the wife beater foreswore their sinful ways every year and sought the forgiveness of the Lord and of their neighbors. After church we all traipsed down to the river where the newly faithful were fully immersed. Then we had a picnic, played baseball and ran relay games.

When proclaiming truth to masses of people Jesus concentrated on simple, basic truths, usually conveyed through parables. To individuals and hand-picked small groups, he sometimes shared the secrets of the universe. Using the same

discretion, we can gauge the level of information to impart by the size and type of the audience we encounter.

Jesus probably wouldn't be very popular with the folks at Disneyland if they knew he had advised against the use of fairy stories and fables--stories that use animals to teach a moral lesson. He was a realist--animals don't have spiritual experiences, and imaginary creatures don't exist. The medium overshadows the message in most of these forms of entertainment (1692). He summarily dismissed all bogus explanations of events, and phoney techniques for making life's decisions: ghosts, casting lots, lucky charms, astrology, witchcraft, magic numbers, and interpretation of symbolism in dreams. (1680).

The later Jews, Muslims, Hindus and others had difficulty accepting Jesus' teachings because the early Christians overemphasized the person of Jesus and his doings, which all but eclipsed his teachings (1670). We can't come along now, tear down the foundation laid by Adam or Melchizedek, and try to replace it with either neo-Christianity or the Urantia Book. We must build on what already exists, first, by emphasizing the truths which are held in common, and second, by enlarging on the idea of the Fatherhood of God (1670).

Twelve women were commissioned by Jesus as authorized teachers of the gospel. No more were men to look down upon women as their spiritual inferiors (1678-9). You could perhaps quietly reassure an individual Muslim woman that God, or Allah, values her, as he does her brother, but you might get into deep water if you were to promulgate equality of women to a Shi'ite Muslim group.

Every race has its own mental outlook and Jesus pointed out that their religions generally run true to these racial viewpoints as well. Never can the religions of authority come to unification (1732). This is well to keep in mind as we design our Urantia Book-related social activities and as the readership expands into groups of individuals having varied racial and cultural backgrounds.

The Master exposed the fallacies in the oral law--the rules and regs the elders regarded as more sacred than scripture. (1713). The Master wasn't a revolutionary; he was a progressive evolutionist (1671-2). He sought to remove meaningless restrictions that separated the child seeking the Father. For example, after telling the parable of the sheep, he got the Pharisees to admit that it was permissible to rescue the sheep on the Sabbath (1665). We all encounter these oral laws among our friends.

A couple of weeks ago a young man at my office happened to comment, "I'm not very religious." I responded, "Maybe what you mean is you don't go to church; that doesn't mean you're not religious." He hastened to add, "Oh yes, I believe in God--I just don't agree with all the rules the church has about confession, abortion, birth control, fasting during Lent, etc." That was the door-opener; we went on from there. A couple of times a week among a group of 20 co-workers, I get a chance to engage in quick little "God talks." We never talk about "your church" or "my group"; it's always something to do with God, and it's usually one-on-one. It's a simple thing, really, but I think it helps shift

the idea of religion away from authority and back to God. Most of us will never preach from pulpits, appear on television or write books, but we can affect the spiritual outlook of many people in small ways.

In closing, I'd like to share something with you. I was in the Forum during the last four years before the book was published. I looked upon the other members of the Forum as some of the most intelligent, cultured and dedicated people I'd ever met. Almost forty years ago, one of the members of the Revelatory Commission took the Forum to task for the lack of enthusiasm exhibited by the majority of the members of the Forum. He expressed amazement at their relative indifference to the importance of the mission entrusted to their hands. I thought to myself: These people are not dedicated? Not enthusiastic? What must true dedication be, then? That message had a profound effect on me at the time. And now, in 1991, as we reappraise our Fellowship, debate matters of representation, fine-tune our Constitution, and plan our next events, we might wonder if the same Revelator, as well as Michael of Nebadon, are still shaking the equivalent of their heads. Do they wonder when we will become more enthusiastic and more dedicated about the real mission entrusted to our hands--building the foundation of spirit fellowship among the world's peoples?