



## Matses Church Wrestles with Issues to Grow Stronger

CPI Conducts Two Conferences in Peru – *By Steven Shepard*

Elizabeth Shepard, Cesar Soto, and I went to the Matses tribe (November 8-14) in the Peruvian Amazon where we held a four day training conference. CPI has been working with Matses church leaders since 1999. In 2010 they began conducting their own conferences with CPI providing gasoline for travel on the rivers.

This recent conference was attended by about 85 Matses Christian leaders – some traveling for up to two days. I felt a special sense of urgency to go at this time because of outside influences bringing confusion and division. A few had been affected by a cult which believes in adherence to Jewish laws including animal sacrifices. But by far the biggest controversy concerned marriage. Outsiders came in and told pastors that they could not continue in their ministries unless they legalized their marriages before Peruvian civil authorities, that they were in fact living “in sin,” and would go to hell unless they repented. This was being applied to couples who were already married according to tribal tradition for many years, had children and grandchildren, and had been faithful. There was one group against civil marriage and another group that insisted on it. There were also younger couples who just seemed to be together without actually understanding what marriage is. So I taught about what God considers a marriage, and also what it means before Peruvian authority, along with the benefits and protections which that can bring. I said it was a good thing to legalize their marriages if they could, but if they were married in the Matses way and understood what it meant before God, that God had accepted their marriages; they were certainly not under condemnation. I think in the end they understood, and agreed not to criticize each other. I was surprised however, how many Matses did not seem to understand the basic nature of the marriage covenant. Young people rejoiced in the teaching saying that they could now build strong marriages! I also encouraged the public practice of exchanging simple marriage vows.

In addition to the teaching on marriage, Cesar Soto taught on the book of Ruth, and the Matses put on a very impressive drama complete with costumes. I also dealt with many other questions and issues: about who could take the Lord’s Supper, about what to do in the case of men who already had two wives before coming to faith, and about their plans to establish an official Matses association of churches. I had been helping the Matses to prepare some by-laws including writing a statement of faith. The first part of the conference was devoted to teaching through the proposed statement of faith, in which I cautioned them about receiving outside preachers unless they first knew them and knew what they believed. My conclusion after a rewarding time with the Matses is this – in the process of wrestling with many changes and difficulties, Matses Christians are being made stronger by God’s grace.

After being stranded in Matsesland for an extra day due to weather, we went back to Iquitos and on to Pucallpa, where we arrived just hours before the start of the conference on “The Attributes of God.” About 85 also attended that conference which impacted both Peruvian and Shipibo church leaders with the God-centered message of the Gospel of grace.



# Knowing God – article by Steven Shepard

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” (John 17:3)

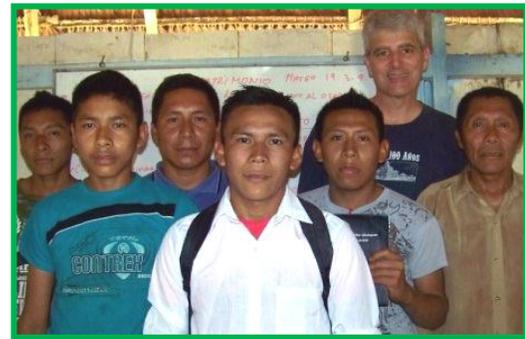
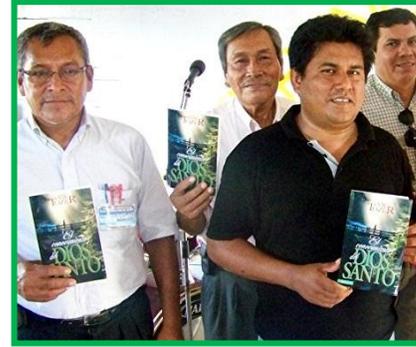
This was my first teaching at the “The Attributes of God” conference in Yarina Cocha, Peru, November 15-18. Here is a brief summary of the main points:

- Jesus explains *the meaning of eternal life* – to know the only true God, and Jesus who is God in human form.
- Knowing God means more than knowing intellectually about God. It means *knowing God personally* through experience. It means having *fellowship* with God through sharing in His life, which has no beginning or end. Knowing God begins when we are “born again” (regeneration), when Christ comes to live within us. Knowing God and being born again are necessary to be saved from sin and judgment.
- Knowing God produces a *profound change* in our lives. Evidences of this change include belief in Jesus, perseverance in faith, love of God, love of the brethren, and obedience.
- Eternal life is to know *“the only true God,”* not a false god. We must be careful not to make a god of our own imagination or according to our own image of how we would like Him to be, instead of coming to Him as He is revealed in Scripture. For example, people emphasize God’s love but not His holiness and justice. They want a god who is permissive and tolerant, but not one who hates sin and punishes wrong doing. Yet we cannot know God’s grace in our lives without a proper understanding of His holiness and our own sinfulness.
- Though the infinite God is *incomprehensible*, we can still know Him and have fellowship with Him through His Spirit. We can also come to understand some things that are true about God which are called His *attributes*. These include God’s eternity, self-existence, sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, immutability, faithfulness, goodness, holiness, justice, love, mercy, grace, and much more.
- *The only way to know “the only true God” is to also know Jesus Christ* whom He sent. It is only Jesus who died for our sins to satisfy God’s justice. We know God only by faith in Christ and what He did on the cross – with nothing added to it. When we believe in Jesus, God credits to us Christ’s perfect righteousness.
- Our faith is itself the result of the *work of God’s grace* in our hearts. God will always finish the saving work He begins in our lives. Once we truly know God through Jesus, we will never be separated from His love.
- After we come to know God by faith in Christ we will desire to seek *to know Him better*. This means becoming more like Christ and also growing in our assurance of salvation. As part of this transformation, we will be hearing and studying God’s Word, praying, and growing in obedience.



Steven Shepard (left) translates for daughter Elizabeth at the “Attributes of God” pastors and leaders’ conference in Yarina Cocha, Peru (near Pucallpa).

Below, pastors receive books at the end of the conference. A total of about 200 books were distributed. This was CPI’s second conference in the Pucallpa area.



Above, Steven is with the Matses who attended the conference from their formerly unreached village of Lobo in Brazil. Matses from Peru planted a church in Lobo and still go on regular visits, with CPI providing gasoline for the long journeys. In Pucallpa (below), Steven met with a group of Yoras and Wycliffe missionaries concerning their tribe, which remains unreached for the Gospel with no churches.



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