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Jonah, Part 8

Steve Walvatne

The Morgue

"Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly" (2:1)

In Jonah 2, the prophet sinks into a veritable morgue. His experience in the sea and in the fish's belly was tantamount to being buried alive. He found himself entombed as it were, in a most inhospitable place. If Nineveh had seemed an intolerable surrounding to this prophet of Israel, how must his current confinement have felt? Yet, the mercy of God provided this unusual place of preservation and used it to induce Jonah's spiritual recovery.

Overall, this is a chapter of prayer. Some call it a prayer for deliverance; others, a prayer of thanksgiving. The latter seems more accurate in that Jonah doesn't "ask" for anything, but rather appreciates what the Lord has already done for him in preserving his life. "When Jonah had been swallowed by the fish and found that he was preserved alive in the fish's belly, he regarded this as a pledge of his deliverance, for which he praised the Lord" (Paul Kleinert: John Lange Old Testament Commentaries). Malcolm Horlock adds that Jonah was "looking back on his timely rescue – upon God's unmistakable answer to an earlier prayer when cast into the sea... Truly, God had intervened to transport him from 'the belly of sheol' (v.2), to the 'belly of the fish' (v.1)..." (The Minor Prophets: Their Relevance for Today, Jonah).

Jonah said he cried "out of the belly of hell (or, sheol)." Sheol corresponds with the word hades in the New Testament and these, though translated in different ways, generally refer to the abode of departed spirits. This does not mean, however, that Jonah actually died and went to "Sheol,"

but that he was in a deep place surrounded by the scent of death.

Prior to this, Jonah was stubborn and resolute in his waywardness. Now, however, Jonah prays, and that's a positive sign. It's always good when saints pray. But why did Jonah wait so long? One would think the storm might have fostered this desire, or that before the sailors threw him overboard, he'd have quickly called upon God. But no. Only under danger of drowning in the Mediterranean Sea did he pray. And now in the fish, he prays again.

Sadly, such is the way with sin. It begets a sort of spiritual paralysis that only energizes the flesh, leading to greater estrangement from God. Think of Adam and Eve. Sin made them cowards. "They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (Gen.3:8). Jonah acted in similar fashion. After being exposed and constrained to testify before the sailors, he appeared anxious to flee further scrutiny by plunging into the stormy deep, as if to assert like he later did, "It is better for me to die than to live" (4:8).

This illustrates a common reality, that once saints pursue a course contrary to God's mind, they are difficult to turn. Things that would stop the sensitive soul or at least give them pause, have minimal impact on determined ones. They press deeper into sin making restoration more difficult, becoming like Samson, who "wist not that the Lord was departed from him" (Jdg. 16:20). Apart from God's gracious intervention, who knows how these wayward souls would end up? Jonah went down and down and down

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before reaching bottom as we see here – *“I went down to the bottoms [or, ‘extremities’] of the mountains”* (v.6).

Sinking into that morgue-like environment, Jonah suddenly realized his peril. Like the prodigal of Luke 15, he at long last “came to himself” (v.17) and prayed, remanding his fate into the hands of Him who moments earlier, he’d tried to avoid. He couldn’t outmaneuver God, and neither can we. Eventually, all avenues of rebellion close in upon the froward. Jeremiah wrote of willful Israel, *“The Lord was as an enemy: He hath swallowed up Israel, He hath swallowed up all her palaces: He hath destroyed his strong holds, and hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation”* (Lam. 2:5). Behind these words is a principle we dare not overlook. God’s people cannot do as they please. If, like Jonah (or Israel), they persist in thwarting heaven’s will, then God becomes an adversary, waiting to swallow them up. Such action naturally entails much sorrow and suffering that might have been averted, yet in it, there are lessons mercifully meant to restore the erring.

“Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God.” Here was Jonah’s thanksgiving prayer from inside the fish and this statement is evidence that the practical intimacy of relationship was being recovered. Positionally, of course, the Lord was still Jonah’s God, but disobedience had dulled its reality. Nothing on earth can surpass the inward realization that the Lord is “my” God, or as David said, *“The Lord is my Shepherd...”* (Ps. 23:1). Johnson Oatman Jr. penned some three thousand hymns and among them is one that beautifully captures the essence of this relationship:

There’s One above all earthly friends
Whose love all earthly love transcends,
It is my Lord and Christ divine,
My Lord because I know He’s mine.

He’s mine because He died for me,
He saved my soul, He set me free;
With joy I worship at His shrine
And cry, “Praise God, I know He’s mine.”

Someday upon the streets of gold
Mine eyes His glory shall behold,
Then, while His arms around me twine,
I’ll cry for joy, “I know He’s mine.”

I know He’s mine, this Friend so dear,
He lives with me, He’s ever near;
Ten thousand charms around Him shine,
And, best of all, I know He’s mine.

Jonah descended to a place where no human could hear his cry. Only the Lord could plumb the depths and understand the full measure of his groaning and tears.

Prayers ascend daily from places worldwide, yet few from locations as unique as Jonah’s. Nehemiah prayed while serving in the palace, Paul and Silas prayed while suffering in a prison, and Hannah prayed while sorrowing before a priest (Neh. 2:4; Acts 16:25; 1 Sam. 1:9-18). Daniel was in his room, Peter was on a roof, and Paul joined others by a river to pray (Dan. 6:10; Acts 10:9; 16:13). The key ingredient, of course, is that we pray “unto the Lord” as Jonah did. Sometimes public prayers veer off. Prayers that preach sermons are misdirected, prayers that provoke saints are misbehaved, and prayers that promote self are just plain miserable. These aren’t supplications, but schemes aimed to gratify the flesh and disrupt the gathering. May the Lord preserve us from such!

In verse 2, the prophet starts to reveal what he expressed while confined in the fish’s belly. Twice, when drowning, he says that he “cried.” The first word “cried” is qara, meaning to “cry out” or “proclaim,” the very thing Jonah was to do before Nineveh (1:2), but now had to do before Jehovah. He couldn’t “summon” others from the bottom of the sea. What a fix this was! Sin brings wayward souls into unimaginable circumstances.

The second word for “cried” is shawa, “a cry for help in distress” (Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies). If qara was Jonah’s original duty in Nineveh, then shawa was what Nineveh needed to do once they heard God’s message. And indeed, Nineveh did do just that for a time, as evidenced by their actions in chapter 3. But here, the servant was distressed himself. He was in need of mercy. The Lord heeded his cry, though the humbling experience didn’t soften Jonah’s feelings towards Nineveh, as one might have thought. How inconsiderate the heart can be even when God has been merciful. Matthew 18:32-33 comes to mind, where a lord rebuked an unforgiving bond-servant, saying, *“O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?”*

Nevertheless, Jonah’s cries were earnest. They ascended silently from his heart as he sank deeper into the sea. Unuttered pleas are often the weightiest. “It is not here merely a loud voice,” writes James Clyde. “It implies close engagements of heart, great fervor, earnestness, and importunity. This is the more strongly indicated as the word is repeated” (The Biblical Illustrator: v.10). George Young agrees, saying the Omniscient “reads the language of the heart, He hears the voice of the soul, and understands the groaning which cannot be uttered. The expression which Jonah employs is merely intended to indicate the warmth of

his desires: he prayed with great fervor, like one who cries aloud for deliverance” (Lectures on the Book of Jonah).

Afflictions frequently extract fervent supplications: *“I cried by reason of mine affliction...”* When all is well, we pray, but rarely like we do when things go wrong. James said of Elijah, *“...The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (5:16). Amid the “lukewarmness” of our day (Rev. 3:16), fewer and fewer prayers have the fervency they used to have. In fact, fervor or passion in the pulpit and prayer meeting is generally derided by modern minds. It’s fine for business and fine for ballgames, but “over the top” when dealing with issues of eternal consequence. Yet the more we adapt to that kind of thinking, the less effectual our preaching and prayers become. Said James again, *“Elias...prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months”* (5:17). Hebrews 5:7, says the Saviour *“offered up prayers and supplications with strong [or, forcible] crying and tears...and was heard in that He feared.”* That fervency of utterance evolves from deep within the soul. Nothing’s “humdrum” in that kind of prayer.

Safe in the fish’s belly, Jonah praised God for hearing his plea, likely considering it a token of further blessing to come. The Lord “gave heed” and “was attentive,” even though Jonah personally, had failed to hearken when Jehovah called him. We might vilify the prophet’s negligence, were it not for similar failures in our own lives. Rather, we rejoice in knowing that God is a restoring God. Jonah did the same, even though present surroundings were morgue-like at best. *(continued)*

As a servant of God, nothing is more important than that you should preserve a pure conscience.

Exercise of Gift

William Rogers

(Excerpted from “Notes on St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians”)

We have already to some extent been occupied with chapter 14, while we were considering its connections with the two chapters that precede it. If these connections are kept in mind they will greatly assist towards an understanding of it; because the three chapters taken together form, as we have seen, a distinct and definite

section of the epistle.

It appears evident, from the way in which chapter 12 begins, that the subject of the gifts was one of those concerning which the Corinthians had written to Paul (ch. 7:1); but from chapter 14 it also seems clear that the reports which had reached him as to their conduct (ch. 1, 11) included a reference to the manner in which they had been misusing some of these gifts in their meetings. That there were at least three manifestations of this evil is suggested in our chapter; and all three of them arose through exercising gift for mere display, instead of for edification. They were:--

1. Undue prominence given to speaking with tongues, as being the most showy among those gifts which they possessed. With this the greater part of the chapter is taken up.

2. Unwillingness to wait upon one another, which led to several exercising their gifts at once, and resulted in “confusion” (vs. 30-33).

3. Certain women pushing themselves to the front by claiming the same right to take part in public ministry as the men (vs. 34-36).

Numerous questions have been raised as to the matters here dealt with, and many and various are the opinions which have been expressed concerning them. Instead of adding to the number of these, we shall, however, in keeping with our title, “note” some of the clues that are to be found in the chapter itself, and also elsewhere, for our assistance in rightly understanding it

One of them, to which attention was drawn when we were considering ch. 11, is the repetition, seven times in all, in that chapter and in this, of the Greek word which is rendered “come together.” These are, as was said, the only places in the New Testament where it is used with reference to meetings of the Assembly; and they form such a bond between the two chapters as should make us slow to draw any distinction between the meetings which are in view in each case, even though ch. 11 has to do with the ordinance of remembrance, and ch. 14 with the ministry.

Another expression which points in the same direction is the phrase “in church” (without the definite article in the Greek, although it is inserted in the A. V.). This occurs in vs. 19, 28, 35, of chapter 14; and is only found elsewhere in chapter 11. 18. It evidently means “in the church as assembled for a meeting,” and may be contrasted with the other phrase, “in the church” (with the article), which we get in ch. 6: 4; ch. 12: 28, etc.

As for the two gifts, “prophesying” and “speaking with tongues,” regarding which our chapter has so much to say; it will be noticed that while the latter apparently was considered by the Corinthians to be the greatest gift they possessed, the former was in Paul’s own estimation second only to apostleship. See ch. 12: 28 and Eph. 4: 11). They were therefore well suited to illustrate the lesson he sought to teach here—that the aim in exercising gift should be, not

self-display, but the profit of the saints. Yet when this lesson has been learned, it has a much wider application than to these two only; as may be seen in v. 26, where after mentioning the exercise of various gifts the Apostle adds, "*Let all things be done unto edifying.*"

These exhortations given in this chapter to "desire spiritual gifts" (v. 1), to "*pray that he may interpret*" (v. 13), and to "covet to prophesy" (v. 39), like that in ch. 12. 31 to "covet earnestly the greater (R.V.) gifts," imply, as was pointed out already, that these gifts might be obtained by prayer and exercise concerning them. If not, the exhortations would be meaningless; while if this was so, the statement one sometimes hears made, that such gifts could only be obtained by the laying on of an apostle's hands, would appear to be incorrect.

That they were at certain times conferred in that manner we know from Acts 19: 6, just as we know from 2 Tim. 1: 6 that the evangelist Timothy received gift in the same way. Yet few would be found to contend that only by laying on of an apostle's hands can the gift of evangelist be given. It may be said that to concede this point is giving something away to those who would uphold the present day silly imitations of "speaking with tongues" and "prophesying"; but truth is never really helped by bringing to its aid statements which cannot be clearly proved from the Scriptures, and which only pass current because they have not been tested.

Another example of the same kind is the opinion sometimes expressed that the gift of tongues resulted in ability to preach the gospel in foreign languages previously unknown. We have neither a statement to this effect, nor an example of it, in the Word of God; and it is inconsistent with the fact, plainly set forth in 1 Cor. 14: 13, that a man might possess the gift, and yet be unable to interpret what he himself had said.

That the "tongues" were actual foreign languages is clear enough from the exclamation of the strangers from all parts in Acts 2: 8-11. "*How hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born.*" But the same passage also shows that the words which they heard were not gospel addresses directed to themselves, but a speaking forth as the Spirit gave utterance of "the wonderful works of God." And no indication is given that the speakers understood their own utterances, although these strangers did. Similarly, in 1 Cor. 14 the exercise of the gift of tongues is described as praying (v. 14), as singing (v. 15), as giving of thanks (v. 16), but not as gospel preaching.

Yet on the other hand, scarcely any city could be named in which in those days more foreigners were to be

found than in Corinth, a fact which may suggest a reason for the Lord dispensing this gift so much more widely there than seems to have been the case elsewhere; not as a means of direct gospel preaching to such, but "for a sign" (v. 22), just as had been the case at Pentecost.

As to "Prophesying," it would be no easy matter to give a definition of that word sufficiently wide to embrace all the circumstances in which it is introduced in the Word of God.

In our modern speech it has become so bound up with foretelling what is future, that we can scarcely think of it in any other connection; yet very much of what the Bible calls prophesying is not at all of this character.

At the one extreme it is used of the fully and verbally inspired writings found in the Scriptures; while at the other we have it applied even to the music and thanksgivings of the Levites in the Temple services. See 1 Chronicles 25: 1-3, and note the remarkable expression in v. 2, where it is said that they "*prophesied according to the order of the king.*" Might we say that in like manner the prophets in Corinth were to prophesy "according to the order" of the apostle as given in this 14th chapter, and emphasized in its closing verses? At least it is clear that what is here called prophesyings cannot be on the same plane as the writings of the O. T. prophets, since Paul feels free to limit their quantity, and suggests in v. 29 that others present should judge as to their quality. If these men were speaking in the very words which God at the time was giving them to speak, would the apostle have dared to thus limit them? And yet on the other hand, the use of the words "revelation" (v. 6) and "revealed" (v. 30) would assure us that in some sense they were delivering messages from God.

Probably the closest parallel to them in O. T. prophesying would be that of which we read in Num. 11: 25-27 on the part of the seventy elders. There too Moses was asked "to forbid" some of them; and his reply, "*Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets,*" sounds very like Paul's words here, "*I would that ye all . . . prophesied*" (v. 5).

One thing more. In the middle of ch. 14 an interesting point is suggested by the mention of certain people called the "unlearned." That these were not members of the local church seems plain from the wording of v. 23, "*If therefore the WHOLE church be come together . . . and there come in those that are unlearned.*" Yet on the other hand, they are carefully distinguished from the unsaved by the phrase used, both in this verse and in v. 24, "unlearned, OR unbelievers," and "*one that believeth not, OR one unlearned.*"

Who then can they be, if not such as having professed faith in Christ have not yet been received into the fellowship of the Assembly? We may leave it to those who tell us that there is no such thing in the New Testament as reception into a local church, to find some other explanation of them consistent with what the chapter says of them. Meanwhile it is to be noticed that though either the unlearned person or the unbeliever may be led to acknowledge that **“God is in you of a truth”** (v. 25); it is only the unlearned, and not the unbeliever, who is thought of as saying “Amen” to the thanksgivings (v. 16).

The Living Word of God

“For the word of God is quick” [living]... Heb. 4: 12

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” 1 Thess. 2: 13

“The first business of the interpreter of Scripture is to find out precisely what every verse or paragraph meant at the time and place where it was written; and there is endless profit in the exact determination of this original application. But, whilst the interpreter’s task begins, it does not end with this. The Bible is a book for every generation; and the deduction of the message which it is intended to convey to the present day is as truly the task of the interpreter. There is a species of exegesis, sometimes arrogating to itself the sole title to be considered scientific, by which the garden of Scripture is transmuted into an herbarium of withered specimens.”
[James Stalker]

The Word of God is unique among all the writings held in the hands of men and read with their intelligence. While other writings may surely move hearts and spirits, and may influence human beings singularly or collectively, there is only one Writing that is timeless in its scope, application, understanding, and appreciation. The Holy Record which God has given us is indeed eternal, and not only will abide when all else has been consummated, but has, and will continue to be appropriately applicable to every people, every nationality, every place, every situation, to the young and the old, to the tender and the calloused, to the scholar

and the uneducated, to the diligent and to the apathetic alike.

It is the great responsibility of the man who will accept the burden of teaching the Scriptures to draw from the depths of this Living Well, to drink deeply at the Fountainhead, and in holy communion with the Divine Author, to be guided in the opening of these eternal truths to his hearers in faithfulness to He who has sent him, rather than in fear of those who hear only to accuse. He must understand their correct interpretation, and give the meaning of that to his audience. He must further give appropriate application of its truths as the Holy Spirit leads him, whether in encouragement or exhortation, whether charge or censure, without any fear of men, whether infidels or professors, who seek to put to death that which lives and works effectively in the hearts of believers.

May the Lord encourage all who take up His Word with true exercise of heart and gift from the ascended Christ, to boldly proclaim eternal living truths, expecting the understanding and application of them to effectively change the lives of those who hear them. May He raise up more men among us who will faithfully tell their audiences “what the Lord hath said”. May the effect of this cause believers to shun the world’s false ways and wisdom, and learn the joy of obedience to the “wisdom which is from above”. May holy, separated believers order their conduct in such a way that the homes and assemblies that they are a part of are strengthened and preserved for the glory of the Lord until the moment when He calls teacher and hearer alike into His presence to give account of our stewardship.

**All heresy is either the Bible plus,
or the Bible minus.**

L S. Chafer

Perils of Assemblies

William Bunting, “Spiritual Balance”

Sundry Perils

It is necessary to repeat that God’s path for His people is one of uncompromising separation from the world in its every aspect political, commercial, ecclesiastical, social, and matrimonial. This is the plain teaching of 2nd Corinthians 6:14-17, the words of which “admit of no concession whatever; they are absolute and abiding. They are not to be regarded as sentiment or theory, or frittered

away by applying them to a limited circle. Their full force and authority ought to be felt, obeyed, enforced, and manifested everywhere” (“Letters of Interest”). This teaching, if learned in fellowship with God, will preserve us from the perils of worldliness against which we have already warned. Nevertheless there are other subtle ways of departure from God. Some of these which have been considered in earlier pages, together with others not yet named, require to be specially underlined today.

The Peril of Inconsistency

There is the peril of inconsistency. Vigilantly see to it, therefore, that your personal holiness, gentleness, and thoughtful consideration of others keep step with your strictness for Church order in public. Do not “strain at a gnat and swallow a camel” as many do. Be strict in judging self before criticising others. Remember that the elder’s first qualification in 1st Timothy 3 is a life “without reproach”. This is but reasonable, for what weight has any man’s stand for truth if it be known that his past is not normally clean, that he is greedy of gain, or that his home life is not right? Forget not that the call to “come out” (2nd Corinthians 6:17) and lead a separated life, is followed by the call to cultivate a sanctified life (ch. 7: 1); and that while Paul trod a narrow path (ch. 6:14-17), he did so with a big heart for God’s people (ch. 6:11). All this reveals the need of godly balance. But where the unequal legs of the spiritually lame are in evidence, need we wonder if men mock at their ungainly and ungracious walk?

The Peril of Prejudice

Further, beware, dear saint, of leaving the simplicity that is in Christ and of becoming formal and legal. Beware of holding the truth in a proud, fleshly way, which is more inclined to harden than to win.

Above all, beware of allowing prejudice to embitter your spirit and rob you of love for all saints, for it is amazing the length to which prejudice can drive even good men. His fellow-Exclusives used to feel scandalised when they saw Mr. J. G. Bellett walk arm in arm with so-called Open brethren upon the streets of Dublin, but the saintly man had so much of the presence of God with him, that no one dared to rebuke him. Eschew the spirit of those detractors. Many other examples of prejudice could be mentioned. Asked about special meetings which had been convened in an assembly, a brother replied, “I went some night just to pass myself.” The preacher was a good and saintly man, whose service for Christ was perfectly scriptural, but he was outside the brother’s little circle of

fellowship. That made all the difference. Oh how low and unworthy our thoughts of God’s sacred work can become, and what a narrow partisan spirit our language can at times betray! If the preacher had been one of ‘his men’ the brother would have been present nightly with a glowing face. Some who have developed a kind of spiritual superiority complex regularly absent themselves from their assembly meetings when certain of the Lord’s honoured servants are to speak, Indeed without evidently having a qualm of conscience they allow their prejudiced party feelings to carry them to even greater extremes.

Hearing that his unconverted son while upon holiday was attending special gospel meetings conducted by two earnest evangelists, a Christian gentleman requested his boy to return home at once, which he did. The preachers, our late esteemed brethren, James Marshall and William McCracken, felt very disappointed at this, as they had been praying for the young man’s conversion. The father was in an extremely narrow circle of fellowship, and the strange, unchristian request was made simply because the evangelists were not in his communion. The sad sequel to the story is that some time later the young man lost his life, leaving no hope for Eternity. Needless to say, such an attitude is utterly foreign to the spirit of Christ, but such is the length to which party prejudice can drive even good men. Beware of it, beloved, as you would a plague. It is the child of ignorance, and so long as it controls a man’s mind, a warped and perverted judgment will be his. Since all the gifts of the Risen Head are needed, just as all the members of the human body are required if it is to function fully and harmoniously, love, and, in every way possible support all sincere. God-sent, God-honouring servants of Christ, without partiality, Partiality was a curse at Corinth, where one favoured Paul, another Apollos, and so on (1st Corinthians 1:12), as we have already seen; and it was the sin of Diotrophes carried to an extreme length (3rd John), Verses 5 to 8 there would teach us that our prayers, hospitality, and practical interest would, as far as is possible, embrace every godly, commended labourer at home and on the mission field. *“Because that for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellowworkers with the truth”* (w, 7, 8. R.V.). Yet some assemblies seem to have fellowship with only a select few, as though the Lord of the great harvest field had no concern about the others. Oh, well it is that His love and care are not so restricted and inconsistent as are the saints at times. Even beloved Paul had to plead with his own spiritual

children, saying, *“Open your hearts to us; we wronged no man, we corrupted no man, we took advantage of no man”* (2nd Corinthians 7.2). How strange and pathetic that one so near to the Lord as an Apostle--one with heart so noble, self-denying and affectionate should have to remind those who owed their very salvation to him that he had never given them any just cause to turn against him as they had done !

The Peril of the Whispering Tongue

If you would be fair and impartial, lend not your ear to the tongue which whispers evil of another. Usually it accomplishes its malicious design by the confidential spread of rumour, surmise and insinuation. It magnifies trifles, impugns motive, misrepresents facts, and delights to create an atmosphere of suspicion. It ever takes advantage of the willing, open ear of the unwary Christian, and many a reputation it has blasted, for a lie will go half round the world before the truth has got on its boots. Speaking of the habit of some preachers to circulate slander, Spurgeon truly said that *“it curdles all the milk of human kindness in a man’s (own) bosom, and he becomes more fit for the detective police force than for the ministry”*. Those who engage in this mean business usually take pleasure in going from house to house and from assembly to assembly, prying into and meddling with other people’s affairs, much like the silly widows of 1st Timothy 5:13. Never in Scripture is the whisperer viewed in aught but an evil light (See Psalm 41:17; Isaiah 29:4; Romans 1:29; and 2nd Corinthians 12:20); and never did our Lord or His Apostles engage in anything surreptitious. When Paul heard the unfavourable report about the Corinthians he wrote to them concerning it, and shrank not from naming its authors (1st Corinthians 1:11). With him all was open and above-board, and this should ever be our attitude. *“Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses”* (1st Timothy 5:19). Whispering is a moral plague--a mischievous practice, which accomplishes nothing better than the separating of *“chief friends”* (Proverbs 16:28). *“Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people . . . I am The Lord”* (Leviticus 19:16). No godly Christian could with a good conscience carry on a campaign of whisper against others. Shun the whisperer, whatever his pretence may be. He is no true friend. Tell him to be gone.

What we have said applies especially to those in oversight. Not infrequently what is spoken privately in the ear is voiced publicly in the assembly business meeting. It is surely an intensely serious matter for men to sit there and use their influence against godly labouring brethren as has

on occasions been done. Sometimes those who do so are men whose own past lives are, to say the least, far from perfect.

Before believing any rumour about a brother, therefore, thoroughly investigate it, and let it not be forgotten that the sin of Joab was that he fell upon and slew *“two men more righteous and better”* than he himself (1st Kings 2:32.). Solemn business!

(continued)

Every year, and even every day we live, we should see more clearly how all the rest and gladness and power of our Christian life hinges on one thing: taking God at His word, believing that He really means exactly what He says, and accepting the very words in which He reveals His goodness and grace without substituting others or altering the precise modes and tenses which He has seen fit to use.

The Righteous Lord Loveth Righteousness

Joel Portman

We have noticed in previous articles that righteousness is a quality that delights God’s heart. He is righteous and looks for righteousness in everything. This is, as we have said, not a standard of righteousness that is according to men or which is acceptable to them, but it is a standard from which we all come short, since it is the quality of doing what is absolutely right on all occasions. We freely admit failure in our own lives when compared with this high and lofty requirement, but it should and must be our exercise of heart to seek to measure up to it as much as is possible.

God is working to eventually establish righteousness in the world (2 Pet. 3:13, *“new heavens and a new earth”* where righteousness dwells, or where it is *“at home,”* or residing permanently). That is, there will then be nothing that will contradict its standards nor violate its principles. Sin and rebellion against the will of God will be no more, and His will and authority will be supremely established in the earth. We look forward longingly to that

day when the righteous Lord will reign in undisputed sovereignty over all the universe. But until then, it is our responsibility to live as citizens of the kingdom of righteousness and to demonstrate in an unrighteous world that we are consciously anticipating that glorious consummation of God's purposes.

Since that is God's ultimate desire and our present ambition, it also means that the Lord delights in companies of saints who corporately are seeking to act according to righteous principles. In order to do so, of course, the Word of God must be studied and carefully understood so that actions are controlled and determined by God's will. Nothing should be done because "it seems right to us." That is very close to the same as God's assessment of Israel at the end of Judges, "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." That condition indicates that the authority of God was being disregarded or rejected, since it existed when there was no king, or source of human authority in those days. The lack of a human figure should never have caused them to "do what was right in their own eyes." That is a characteristic of last days, and though we are in those days, we need not be controlled by last day conditions. However, remembering that Philadelphia precedes Laodicea (Rev. 3), there is a thin line that divides one from the other, and each condition is not permanent.

Old Testament Leaders

We learn from Divine principles and passages of the Old Testament that righteous men were sought to lead the people of God. God taught them in Ex. 23:7-8, "*Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked. And thou shall take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous.*" Their judgment was not to be swayed by enticements of any nature. Again in Ex. 18:21, Jethro, Moses' father in law, advised him to "*provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: and let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee.*" It seems clear that this was the requisite for those who would guide and rule among Israel, and that they were expected to do so, having learned the truth from Moses (who can be seen typically representing Christ), and under his authority.

Lev. 19:15 emphasizes the same truth: "*Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but*

in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour." Anything that would cause a miscarriage of justice among the people was to be strictly avoided so that the nation might be characterized by righteousness and justice among them. That indicates that partiality in any form of judgment was to be strictly avoided. Friendships, personalities, or other personal characteristics couldn't enter into their decisions. God is no respecter of persons, and neither were they to be. Inconsistency in judgments or even in personal assessments is often a plague among God's people of any age and can cause much discouragement and dismay.

Moses charged those who would carry this responsibility in Deut. 1:15-17: "*So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known, and made them heads over you, captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens, and officers among your tribes. And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.*" These, with other references, emphasize the solemn importance of maintaining righteousness among God's people (Ps. 72:2, Deut. 16:18-20, 19:17-21). God's condemnation of the nation was that they had failed to do so (Isa. 5:23, Jer. 22:3-9).

New Testament Requirements

The Lord responded to the criticism of the Jews in John 7:24 by saying, "*Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.*" That is, in order to judge any matter righteously, we must have all the evidence, at least as far as possible, and not assess any situation by what it appears to be on the surface. Too often, sadly, we are prone to make a judgment about a matter in our hearts, and possibly in our talk, about something that may be distant and about which we only know one part, or one side of the story. This is all the more true in days of instant communications that can reach across vast areas of a country or around the world. In addition, what is in the heart is unknown to us, and to presume to judge a brother's motives is to try to do something that only God is capable of. Once an incident took place when a brother, over the phone, assailed another for some failure by saying that he was only doing those things for self. The condemning brother had no idea, nor any right, to judge the motives of

the other one since doing so was wrong, first of all, and he couldn't have possibly known for sure. Of course, there are things that can be said, at times, which more rational thought would have prevented.

Ah, His are thine to serve; Christ's brethren here
 Are needing aid; in them thou servest Him.
 The least of all is still His member dear;
 The weakest cost His life-blood to redeem.
 Yield to no "party" what He rightly claims,
 Who on His heart bears all His people's names.

Be not men's servant, think what costly price
 Was paid that thou mayest His own bondsman be,
 Whose service perfect freedom is. Let this
 Hold fast thy heart. His claim is great on thee;
 None should thy soul enthrall to whom 'tis given
 To serve on earth, with liberty of Heaven.
 quoted by W. Bunting in "Spiritual Balance"

Assembly Discipline

Sadly, since we are men at the best, there can be and have been cases when assembly discipline wasn't carried out in righteousness and on scriptural grounds. One regrets to recognize this, but it is the truth. In one case, a number of brethren and sisters were put out of an assembly for expressing to the elders their concerns about some practices of the assembly. In another, a brother was removed from the fellowship for railing, after he had been invited to a meeting of the elders and asked to express to them the concerns that he had. Fortunately, in that case, the brethren were honest enough later to acknowledge that they were wrong, but it was too late. Even another involved a good brother being put out of a local assembly for a trifling matter that took place in a family gathering. To take trivial matters and expand them into any excuse for action against a brother could indicate a desire to punish another simply out of prejudice. That is not righteous! One brother was threatened with discipline for a prolonged time because of a thought he expressed regarding a point of Scripture, even though he had never taught it. There can be acts of discipline that are not with the clear support of the scripture nor of the facts. Such shouldn't exist if righteous judgment without prejudice prevails among the saints, but again, without making excuse for failure, such miscarriages of judgment can take place when brethren are not guided explicitly and spiritually by the Word of God. However, in saying this, we admire, appreciate and adhere to the most who seek to do what is right and scriptural for the good of God's people.

It's possible to act on a matter without careful consideration of all aspects and without careful, prolonged waiting on God. A matter may have been continuing for

years in a brother's life or even in an assembly, but when it comes to the light, some feel that they must act swiftly and without making sure of the matter and acting wisely. If it has been existing for many years, is there any need for hurry if there is the possibility of making a mistake? Obviously, there are cases which are clear and there is no need for delay, but sometimes there is a need for time and wise consideration without prejudice or preference so that God's will is executed. He will not condemn the righteous or clear the guilty, but we possibly can, due to our limitations of knowledge. There is a need in every case for a wisdom that descends from above, Divine in its origin, that sometimes goes against the current of popular opinion. One remembers a case when the majority of brethren in an assembly felt that a brother should be disciplined for covetousness, but the elders, acting with restraint and wisdom, felt that there was not enough clear evidence to do so, and refrained from so acting. That decision was not popular, but likely was correct.

Other assemblies acting autonomously can assess whether or not the judgment by another is righteous, scriptural and correct or not. How they react and what they do will be their responsibility before the Lord as well, remembering that God doesn't simply "rubber-stamp" an assembly decision. It would seem clear that in Matt. 18:18, the tenses indicate that it is the responsibility of the local assembly of believers to act on a matter from the standpoint of knowing what God has already determined, and to carry out righteousness according to His standard in the gathering of saints on earth. That is, what they do will be bound on earth as it has already been bound (forbidden) in heaven, and vice versa. If what an assembly does is not the mind of God as revealed in His Word, it would be difficult to expect that a righteous Lord would be in agreement with it. This requires careful assessment of every matter in the light of Holy Scripture to know what would clearly be God's mind. The wrong usage of passages to try to support any action could not fall into this category or be righteous.

While there is a difference of opinion on 3 John as to whether or not Gaius was yet in the assembly where Diotrophes ruled, it seems to this writer that the language would support, at least, the possibility that he was not yet among that number. One cannot be dogmatic about it, but since Gaius received those (v. 5) that Diotrophes rejected and forbade them who would (v. 10) even casting them out of the church, it would be hard to visualize Gaius remaining in that fellowship. If he was, it is evident that he wouldn't have been on the popular side and would have endured difficulties for his actions. If he were not in the assembly, it

seems evident that the aged apostle John didn't recognize such an act but continued to acknowledge the faithfulness of a dear brother to whom he was writing. It would have been unrighteous to do so and he would have been acting in accordance with a wrong deed.

May the Lord enable us in this day of feeble assembly testimony to seek to maintain righteous principles, avoiding doing that which is right in our eyes or what seems to prevail in the world around us. Let us be careful to recognize responsibility to our righteous Lord and to maintain a sphere where saints are able to go on in a measure of assurance that if they act according to scripture, they will be able to continue to enjoy fellowship in a local assembly without fear. Such an environment will stand out pleasingly to the Lord in the midst of a world and society that is increasingly unrighteous.

The Man of Calvary

Henry-de-Graaf

There is a Man on yonder throne
Who suffered once for me;
My sin, my guilt, He made His own
On dark, dark Calvary.
That blessed Man, of Calvary,
I'll praise Him more and more.
And still throughout eternity
That peerless Man adore.

One pierced hand was on the throne,
The other laid on me.
The Man betwixt my cause has won,
On dark, dark Calvary.
He reconciled the sinning one,
The wrath of God appeased;
The grief, the pain, He bore alone,
That peerless Man, for me.

At times, my heart within me melts,
And words I cannot speak.
When dwelling on the pain He felt
On dark, dark Calvary.
But, Oh, sweet thought, I'll see Himself
He's coming soon for me.
The object of all worship then,
That peerless Man, shall be.

followed Him afar off, *"sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest."* Then he changed his position, going out into the porch, when another maid said, *"This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man."* Again he moved, entering into the judgment hall and standing by the fire, where he was called to meet the same accusation. *"Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man"* (Matt. 26:69-74).

He was no longer a rock, but dust and ashes blown away by the breath of a servant girl. The death and resurrection of his disowned and dishonored Lord followed, and we find the denying disciple with six of his fellow-disciples on the shores of the sea of Galilee. Restless, dissatisfied with himself, unhappy, craving employment and excitement, *"Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing."* They were learning in their own experience the lesson the Master had taught them before His departure, *"Without me ye can do nothing,"* not, a little, but "nothing" (John 15:5).

"But when the morning was now come," fair type of the approaching millennial morning, *"Jesus stood on the shore,"* unknown to the disciples who were not expecting His coming then and there. He called to them in the familiar language of the country, asking if they had caught anything, and then His voice went ringing across the water, *"Cast the net on the right side of the ship. and ye shall find. They cast there-fore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes."*

Instantly the quick perception of John's love, looking in the light of unhindered fellowship, led him to say to Peter, *"It is the Lord."* What an announcement to make to one who a few days before had declared with cowardly cursing, *"I know not the man!"* If he had been as many now who have denied their Lord, he would have exclaimed, "Let me hide at the bottom of the boat, let me spread the sail and hurry to the other side of the sea, let me in some way escape His presence!" But no, he girt his fisher's coat about him, and, leaping into the sea, swam straight to the feet that still bore the scars of the nails. In answer to the intercession that never fails, his faith had not failed, and while the law would have beaten him back, grace drew him on to be restored to lost communion.

"As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread." The Master of the feast had provided for the refreshment of his

Strength Renewed

John 21:11

When the blessed One was brought to the bar of the high priest *"as a lamb to the slaughter,"* Peter, who had

wearry guests, as He will welcome His “fishers of men” (Mark 1:17) in the morning of the millennial glory, and as He is today sending forth the precious invitation of His grace to perishing sinners, *“Come; for all things are now ready”* (Luke 14: 17) ; *“Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught;”* for the Old and New Testament saints will be presented together at His coming. *“Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.”*

This is a remarkable statement in view of the preceding testimony that the disciples all together *“were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.”* But what seven men could not do in their own strength, one man easily did when he went to his work from the feet of Jesus. Peter was weaker than gossamer thread when he followed his Lord afar off, but in the presence of his Lord seven-fold power came upon him. The look of reproach in the judgment hall had broken his heart, and sent him out into darkness and loneliness to weep bitterly; and now the look of love thrilled him with super-human energy, as it did Gideon, when *“the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might”* (Judges 6:14). He began to understand the words that were spoken when his fall was predicted, *“I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren”* (Luke 22:32).

The place of strength is still found at the feet of Jesus, and strength will be imparted precisely in proportion as we draw nigh His divine person in conscious fellowship. *“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint”* (Isa. 11:29-31) ; *“Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord”* (Ps. 27:14) .

It is humiliating to know, if one may speak for others, that we are so slow to avail ourselves of the unfailing source of strength found in Christ for the feeblest, who will heed His tender entreaty to abide in Him (John 15:4). Abiding implies, not a formal and occasional approach into his presence, but close and constant communion; and there is no limit to the power of those so abiding. *“Blessed are they that DWELL in thy house: they will be still praising thee.”* Selah. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee: in whose heart are thy ways: who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well: the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth

before God" (Ps. 84:4-7). But our strength must be in Him, for it is only as we "worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh," we can add with the Apostle, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 3:3; 4:13).

CONTENTMENT

Anon

Cleon hath a thousand acres--Ne'er a one have I;
Cleon dwelleth in a mansion,--in a lodging, I;
Cleon hath a dozen fortunes,--hardly one have I;
Yet the poorer of the twain, -- is Cleon, and not I.

Cleon, true, possesseth acres,--but the landscape I;
Half the charms to me it yieldeth, money cannot buy.
Cleon harbors sloth and dulness,--fresh'ning vigor I;
He in broadcloth, I in homespun,--richer man am I.

Cleon is a slave to grandeur,--free as thought am I;
Cleon fees a score of doctors,--need of none have I.
Wealth surrounded, care environed, Cleon fears to die;
Death may come, he'll find me ready,--
happier man am I.

Cleon sees no charm in nature,--in a daisy I;
Cleon hears no anthem ringing in the earth and sky;
Nature sings to me forever,--earnest listener I,
State for state with all attendance,--who would change?
Not I!

Cleon sees no worth in Jesus,--His redeemed am I;
Cleon knows no rest or comfort,--
peace with God have I;
Cleon dreads his dissolution,--“Better far,” says I,
Cleon has no heavenly prospects,--
Christ and home have I!

Sufficiency in Christ

The boundless stores of Providence are engaged for the support of the believer. Christ is our Joseph, who has granaries full of wheat; but He does not treat us as Joseph did the Egyptians, for He opens the door of His storehouse, and bids us call all the good thereof our own. He has entailed upon His estate of Providence a perpetual charge of a daily portion for us; and He has promised that one day we shall clearly perceive that the estate itself has been well-farmed on our behalf, and has been always ours. The axle of the wheels of the chariot of Providence is Infinite Love, and Gracious Wisdom is the perpetual charioteer.