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Josiah, pt. 4

Robert Surgenor

HIS ACHIEVEMENTS

It is one thing to exterminate the evil. It is another thing to restore the good. After six years of purging the land, the king, now twenty-six years of age, turns his thoughts to the house of the Lord his God (2 Chronicles 34:8). The first mention of that expression, "the house of the LORD" is found in Exodus 23:19 and is connected with two things. First, the bringing of their firstfruits unto the LORD. Second, the prohibition of seething a kid in his mother's milk. Thus we see crops and cattle. As for the crops, God was to have the firstfruits. Josiah was giving God the best days of his life, the firstfruits of his sojourn here. It is noble to see a young man bearing the yoke in his youth for God. When God calls a man to launch out into the great harvest field with the gospel, in total dependence upon Himself for pioneer work, he calls young men, not men that have built up a retirement fund, with their best days behind them.

As for the cattle, a tenderness to natural relationships must be shown. A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast, and to wrench away a baby calf from its mother and to slay it could hardly be called a compassionate act. Josiah was not only a man with strong convictions, but he was also a man of tender compassion. When he considered the sins of the nation against his God, he wept (34:27). The Lord Jesus used the scourge in the temple, but he also wept at the tomb of Lazarus.

Whenever one seeks to accomplish something for the house of the LORD (the assembly), is it not wise to seek council? Before commencing his work on God's house, Josiah makes contact with Shaphan, the secretary of state. He had charge of the finances and trained the young prince in political economy; Masseiah, the Governor of Jerusalem; and Joah, the son of Joahaz, the official historian; Hilkiah, the high priest, who had charge of Josiah's religious education; and Huldah

the prophetess, with her husband Shallum, who were in close attendance as guides and advisors. Josiah also had a young companion noted for his piety, patriotism, and clear insight into divine truth — Jeremiah the prophet. Thus the work was delegated to these highly-placed officials. This reminds us of the words of Solomon. "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14). Never had there been in the Jewish court a more noble band of God-fearing men.

When things are to be accomplished in the assembly of God a wise move is to do it through council. Josiah placed confidence in capable men. What a contrast in the assembly where Diotrephes prevailed. John says, "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not" (3 John 9). What a misplaced affection - loving to have the preeminence! That will never do brethren. There should be no allowance of dictators in any assembly of God. The plurality of elders is the scriptural pattern. Not just one pastor (shepherd) but a multiplicity of pastors for each scripturally gathered company of God's people. Anything that we do relative to the testimony, must be done in fellowship with our brethren. Reception into the assembly is not a one-man decision. Putting away from an assembly is not a one-man act. There is no such thing in Holy Scripture as a free lancer launching himself into full-time gospel work. Oh no, my dear brethren. There must be council, there must be whole-hearted commendation from the brethren. It is interesting to notice, that the expression, "the house of the LORD" is mentioned nine times from 2 Chronicles 34:8 to 35:2. Then the next mention of it is in 36:7, which is exceedingly sad. "Nebuchadnezzar also carried off the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon."

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Regarding the various times the house of the LORD is mentioned in Josiah's day, it is interesting to notice the settings. In 34:8 we have preparations made for the repair of the house of the LORD. In 34:10 we find workman that had the oversight of the house of the LORD. In 34:14,15 we discover a book of the law found in the house of the LORD. In 34:17 we notice money delivered to the overseers and workmen for their labor relative to the house of the LORD. In 34:30 we observe the king reading all the words of the book of the covenant in the house of the LORD. Finally, in 35:2 we observe the priests in their charges being encouraged in their service relative to the house of the LORD. What a beautiful picture of revival, godliness, unity and accomplishment!

In the repairing and future maintaining of God's house a variety of workers are mentioned. Workmen that had the oversight; Workmen that repaired, perfecting that which they commenced (amend, vs. 10); Artificers; Carpenters; Builders; and Masons (2 Kings 22:6); Skillful musicians; Bearers of burdens; Scribes; Officers; and Porters. It reminds me of what we have in the maintaining of a scriptural assembly today. We have gifts given to every individual for the scriptural functioning of the testimony. In Romans 12 we have God dispensing the gifts of, ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, ruling, and showing mercy. In Ephesians 4 it is Christ imparting the gifts of evangelism, shepherding, and teaching. In 1 Corinthians 12 we discover the Holy Spirit dividing diversities gifts to every man severally as He will. Thus we see the Trinity working in the dispensing of gifts for the preservation and functioning of the local assembly.

It is very encouraging to read verse 10 in chapter 34 of Second Chronicles. "And the men did the work faithfully." There was a firmness, fidelity and steadfastness associated with their labors. Do you remember the war in Exodus 17? Amalek fought with Israel. Moses is on the top of the hill interceding for Israel's army and as long as his hand was held up, Israel prevailed. However, when his hand was let down, Amalek prevailed. Aaron and Hur provided the solution to Moses' weariness. The scripture states, "But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun." That word steady is the same word as that word faithful in our consideration. Exodus 17 provides the first occurrence of that word in the Bible. Moses' hands were made steady through the help of others. In our day, many persons have remained faithful in their work for God through the service of others. When I see a faithful saint, it encourages me to be faithful. When my wife and I were newly saved, we became acquainted with an extremely godly man in the assembly, David L. Roy. He became our model and had a tremendous influence over us regarding

our desires to live for God. We loved his company and treasured his advice. He helped us to be steady for God. He played a tremendous part in our desire to be faithful to the house of the LORD. Shepherds in a local assembly have a tremendous responsibility to be ensamples, or models to the flock. Peter writes, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). If you are an overseer, let me ask you, is your life Christ-like and a good example for your sheep to follow? I have seen so-called shepherds retire, purchase a motor-home and absent themselves from their flock for months, touring the country. Is that an example conducive to godliness in others? Hardly! Remember my dear overseer, you shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of all the time that the Lord has given unto you. How are you using your time? For the good of the flock, or for self?

Paul wrote Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example (a model) of the believers, in worn in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). Young men, what sort of pattern are you setting forth in your life for others to behold? Are you Josiah-like, all for God? or are you of the same nature as Demus? of whom it was said, "Having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). Paul informs the assembly at Thessalonica that they were "ensamples (a model) to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia" (1Thes. 1:7). How wonderful to see an assembly that all other assemblies would do good to imitate. Is the assembly with whom you are associated setting forth a godly example for all to see? Do you thunder out the gospel to a perishing world? Have the saints turned from their worldly idols to faithfully serve the living God? Are the saints looking upward with great anticipation, waiting for the Lord's coming? Is there manifested a work of faith, a labor of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and your Father? Such was the case at Thessalonica. How does your assembly compare?

Finally the apostle says, "Be ye followers (imitators) of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1Cor. 11:1). Paul, like King Josiah, was a man wholeheartedly for God. May it be so with all of us, the author included!

HIS ASTONISHMENT AND APPRECIATION

Having discovered the Book of the Law of the LORD in the House of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest made it known to Shaphan the scribe, who in turn carried the Book to Josiah and read before the king. This book may have been the original signature of Moses. What a traumatic experience! The historian tells us, "when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes" (2 Chron. 34:19). Is it not amazing the tremendous impression that the Word of God engraved upon the king's heart and mind? Let me ask you, how does the Word of God affect you when you hear it? Years ago an old saint related to me the effect the spoken

ministry had on the saints as they were gathered together in conference capacity. His memory related occasions to me that took place in the eighteen hundreds. He told me that many saints wept at conferences. What made them weep? It was the Word of God exposing to them their worldliness that produced such contrition of heart. Let me say, those saints were far godlier than us today, yet when they heard God's Word, they felt condemned over their ways, and in contrition before God—they wept. They attended those conferences not for social activity, but rather for spiritual cleansing and a reviving in soul to the things of God.

What do we have in our day? Be honest! I see this. A lot of planning, a lot of labor, a lot of money spent to cater to those who attend an assembly's conference. That is kind and noble of such saints and I would not seek to detract from such labor of love. Accommodations are provided and the saints from various parts of the country commence to arrive at the prescribed location. The conference commences with a prayer meeting, usually on a Friday evening. In many cases, few are present. Even some preachers who will be at the conference seemingly cannot attend the prayer meeting. On Saturday the ministry commences. As one elder expressed to me his appraisal of some speakers, he said. "They are like Columbus when he sailed for the new world, he didn't know where he was going. When he got there, he didn't know where he was, and when he finally sat down, he didn't know where he had been." It is sad when a brother rises in the flesh and the ministry that is given is weightless and time is wasted. Other times the ministry is heart-warming and the speaker is helped of God. On rare occasions the ministry becomes very searching and practical. How much we need to be encouraged as the Lord's people, but also how much we need to be warned and corrected. The Holy Spirit will produce a divine balance in the ministry if He is allowed to be the sole master of ceremonies on such occasions.

However, when the conference is all over and the providing assembly has labored and spent much money, what really is the ultimate result? The social activity was wonderful. Meeting old friends was great. Young folks came in contact with others and marriages, in some cases, will result. But brethren, what should be the main thrust of such gatherings? Finding a prospective mate for life? Having a pleasant social time together? Having delicious meals served to us at no cost to ourselves? Is the conference merely a "cheap vacation?" Perish the thought! Do we understand that the main objective of our conferences should be the producing of greater holiness in our lives? A greater desire to please God? A producing of repentance in our hearts from being thoroughly searched from the ministry? If this was the case there would be, with no doubt, a measure of weeping. The very fact that such a spirit is rarely seen and so few tears are shed reveals to me that we have lost the fact of why conferences were ever commenced amongst us. Some years ago, a Christian related to the late

William Ferguson, editor of the Words in Season magazine, that the conference they were at was just wonderful. Mr. Ferguson asked them, "Well, just what did you get? What did you learn?" They replied, "We had a lovely time." Then they mentioned how wonderful a certain preacher was. Mr. Ferguson asked them, "What was his message?" They couldn't remember, neither could they tell him of anything learned. I believe that this incident could be echoed in many places. When the Word of God was read, it was very effective—Josiah wept!

Not only did the king weep, he rent his clothes before God. He sat astonished and full of grief. Many people in ages past had rent their clothes. The first recorded one was Reuben when he returned to the pit only to find his brother Joseph missing (Genesis 37:29). Jacob rent his clothes over an evil report. Joshua rent his clothes over a disaster in battle. Caleb rent his clothes over the unbelief of his brethren. Rending their clothes was an expression of utmost grief and Josiah's soul was thus affected over the departure of the nation before God.

We have great need to be prepared for trials of faith and patience in so great a business as reading the Scriptures with an understanding heart. It is only by faith and patience, and prayerful meditation of the Word, that we are delivered from imaginations of the flesh—from sacrificing to our own net, and burning incense to our own drag.

R. C. Chapman

Priesthood and Ministry

W. E. Vine

In matters of doctrine it is of vital importance that the authority upon which act shall be one on which we can unhesitatingly rely. The Divine authority, sufficiency, and finality of the Holy Scriptures is established both from their internal evidences and from external confirmation. To follow any teaching contradictory to the doctrines taught by Christ and His Apostles is to challenge the accuracy of the Holy Spirit, and His prerogatives as therein set forth

Believers as Priests

Apostolic teaching concerning Christian priesthood is clearly set forth as follows: The Apostle Peter says, "Ye also as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to

God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5) ; again, “Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood” (v. 9). The Apostle John gives the same testimony in Rev. 1:5, 6, (R. V.) “Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood, and who made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” (cf. 5:10).

The Apostasy of Christendom

To this divinely-inspired and authoritative teaching, that all believers are priests, the establishment of an ecclesiastical class of priests in the religious systems of Christendom is flagrantly contrary. The teaching of Christ and His Apostles as revealed in the New Testament gives no countenance to such a distinction as a priestly hierarchy in contrast to the laity, nor does the terminology of the New Testament support such a distinction in the slightest degree. The New Testament never speaks of the spiritual guides in the churches as priests (hiereis) That is applied to the Aaronic priests, to Christ and to all Christians. The Presbyter from whence the English word “priest” is derived, never denoted a sacerdotal priest nor is the latter used of any exclusive set of ecclesiastical functionaries.

Sources of Apostasy

The sources from which the sacerdotal system referred to, with its gross departure from the revealed will of God, are twofold—internal and external. Internally the spirit of rivalry already existent in apostolic times (see 1 Cor. 1:1-4; 3 John 10) gave rise to a humanly established authority. The Apostle John warned his readers in his second Epistle concerning anyone who “taketh the lead and abideth not in the teaching of Christ” (v. 9, R. V.). This taking of the lead, instead of recognizing spiritual gifts raised up by the Holy Spirit, led to the development of a system by which ministerial functions became vested in a single ecclesiastic over each church and, ere long, resort was had, not to humiliation before God on account of such departures, and a return to and conformity to apostolic teaching in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, but to the convening of church councils and the substitution of a clerical class on a still, further-extended scale, with the appointment of, higher ecclesiastic orders. Clerisy attained to its full organization in the fourth century. It was in this system that the scriptural distinction between ecclesiastical officials, known priests, and the laity under them, became established.

External Influences

External influences were derived from two sources. In the first place there was the Levitical priesthood established in Israel under the Divine arrangement formed for that people. This Aaronic priesthood was of a temporary character and belonged to the period of types and shadows. The Levitical

priests were but assistants to the High Priest who could not accomplish everything. Moreover, all Israel was originally chosen as a kingdom of priests to God, but Israel renounced the privilege (Exod. 20:18-21 Deut. 5:25-27), and God accepted their renunciation (5:28; 18:17). Not even does the high-priesthood of Christ correspond to the Aaronic priesthood, for He is a Priest for ever “after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 6:20; 7:7-24), a priesthood established previously to, and altogether apart from, the Levitical priesthood. But to regard elders or bishops in the churches as corresponding to priests in Israel under the Law is an utter confusion of ideas and a perversion of the truth.

The other external influence was derived from the priestcraft of Paganism, which was introduced into the ecclesiastical system of Christendom in the fourth and fifth centuries, when the apostasy from the truth had reached its height. This debasing, God-dishonoring combination served to establish the clerical domination in the churches of Christendom, for which “priestcraft” is a suitable term. It is as different from the priesthood of believers as black from white. Its methods exalt and enrich its functionaries, while keeping the subjects of its tyranny in the bondage of superstition.

The Accompaniments of Believers’ Priesthood

The Church had become united to the world. The civilized world had become what is known as “Christendom.” No longer were spiritual life, and a walk well pleasing to God, requisite before souls were recognized as eligible for fellowship in the Christian assembly. The professing church became a mass of baptized professors who readily yielded up the spiritual functions which they could not possibly fulfill, to a caste of men who were supposed to undertake these responsibilities for them. Only believers—those who have been born again by the Spirit of God, not through a few drops of water sprinkled upon them—can exercise spiritual priesthood. They are “a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices.” They are to present their bodies “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Rom. 12:2). They are “to do good and communicate: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb. 13:16). In their worship they are all privileged to draw near to God by the “new and living way.” They have “boldness (or freedom) to enter into the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus” (Heb. 10:19). They need no priestly official to introduce them there as worshippers. Their one Mediator is Christ Himself, and their privilege is based upon His death.

Ministry: Scriptural and Otherwise

When we consider the subject of ministry, as taught in the New Testament, we again find striking contrast to the traditional ideas held by the various sects of Christendom. In the ministerial systems it signifies an office held by a priest or clergyman, or dissenting minister, a single clerical

official over a congregation, with some particular title attached to his person. By virtue of his office he is to conduct worship, preach sermons, visit the members of his congregation, and generally attend to the cure of souls. Such is the popular idea of “ministry.” But all this is contrary to the Divine order in the teaching of the Word of God concerning churches.

What Obedience to God Would Mean

The notion that what the Old Testament has said about priests and Levites in the Jewish economy, is to be applied to Christian ministry in the churches, is entirely contrary to what the Scriptures themselves set forth. While the Reformation produced a break away from the vast ecclesiastical system of Popery, itself the outcome of apostasy from the truth, it left the remnants of this apostasy still operating in what is miscalled “the established Church,” and in the various religious bodies of Protestantism. Were there a definite and willing return therein to the Word of God, it would mean a complete upsetting of the system of ministerial functionaries to which we have referred. It would, of course, be against the material interests of the “ministers” themselves to advocate such a return. Yet such a return would bring about the substitution of God’s order and of the Holy Spirit’s prerogatives, with the recognition of the true authority of Christ, for the confusion and ruin that exist in Christendom.

The Prerogatives of the Holy Spirit

The teaching of the 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians, makes clear that in a single local church the Holy Spirit bestows varying gifts upon the members who constitute the assembly: “but all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as He will.” So in the 14th chapter, verses 23 to 31, which reveal it as the mind of the Lord that an assembly should be open to the operation of the Holy Spirit among its members, apportioning and raising up spiritual gifts, according to His own will, all being subject to the injunctions laid down in respect of such gatherings.

There is no allusion in this or any other Epistle to the existence of any official minister or pastor over a Church. No Epistle is addressed to such a functionary. The teaching of the apostle Peter is consistent with what is set forth in 1 Corinthians. In exhorting believers to the exercise of love and hospitality, he says at the same time, “according as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God; if any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth” (1 Pet. 4:10, 11).

Ministry as Taught in the Scriptures

In the New Testament, ministry is presented as the rendering

of any service of the saints to God and to one another. Whatever spiritual gifts, by way of oral ministry, the ascended Lord has bestowed, they are “for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph.4:12, R.V.). Here the word “ministering” is to be noticed. The phrase in the A.V., “for the work of the ministry,” might lead to the impression of an officially ordained pastorate, according to the popular notion above referred to. But this is not what is intended. The object in view is to perfect the saints for the work of “serving,” that is to say, their particular service for the Lord. The word in the original is diakonia, whence the English word “deacon” is derived. The same word is used in Luke 10:40 of Martha’s “serving”; in Acts 6:1 of the daily “ministration of funds”; in Acts 11:29 of the sending of “relief” to needy saints; in 2 Cor. 9:1 and 13 of the same ministration to those in need. When the Apostle sends a message to be given to Archippus (Col. 4:17), and says, “Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it,” he is speaking, not of the ministerial office, but of the service, whatever it was, which Archippus was appointed to fulfill.

Other New Testament Expressions

So with the verbal form of the same noun. It is in reference to financial matters that the Apostle says, “I go to Jerusalem to ‘minister’ unto the saints” (Rom. 15:25) In Heb. 6:10 those addressed are commended in that they “ministered to the saints and do minister.” The Lord Himself, speaking of such ministry, makes Himself the example to be followed: “Whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant: even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:26-28) So again in John 12:26: “If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will the Father honor.”

These instances are sufficient to show that the word (noun and verb) is expressive of service in general. So to translate it as if it referred to ecclesiastically ordained “ministry” is not to represent the true meaning of the original. In 1 Tim. 3:10, 13 the A.V. has inserted the word “office,” but there is nothing corresponding to this in the Greek. In verse 10 the single verb diakoneo should be translated “let them serve,” and in verse 13, “they that have served.” The noun “deacon” in this passage means a servant or minister of the assembly (avoiding any idea of a clerical functionary).

Another word represented in the English Versions by the term “ministry” is *huperetes*, primarily an under-rower, and hence generally an attendant or servant, whether official or domestic, e.g., Mark 14:54 of the servants of the High Priest. John Mark was the “minister” of Paul and Barnabas, assisting them by his service. The Apostle de-

scribes himself and his fellow-workers as “ministers,” or servants, of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

There are other words which describe the service rendered to the Lord by His people, as, e.g., “doulos,” a bondsman. Limitations of space prevent our noticing these and their meaning. While all bear testimony to the varying character of service, their teaching is consistent with those forms of ministry in Scripturally constituted churches as distinct from the ecclesiastical orders existent in the religious systems of Christendom.

The Solemn Issues

To adhere to the teaching of Scripture in these respects, as in other matters, is of the utmost importance, for by the Word of God our ways and work are to be judged hereafter. What is our choice to be, the will of the Lord or the traditions of men? To adhere to the dictates of clericalism and abide in the humanly arranged systems of Christendom must mean irretrievable loss in the day of Christ.

If the Bible is provenly inspired by the divine Spirit, then Christian theology is truly a science, for by it we may truly "know". But if the Bible is anything less than provably inspired, then Christian theology instead of being "the queen of the sciences", is merely religious philosophy and human speculation.

-- J. Sidlow Baxter
(1903-1999, Our Bible: The Most Critical Issue)

“No King in Israel”

Joel Portman

Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25, Matt. 16:18-19, 18:15-20

Conditions that are recorded at the end of Judges possibly existed for the majority of the entire span of the book. Their placement at the end seems to indicate a dispensational order in that they describe what will take place at the end of the church age.

However, they were sad conditions that God never intended nor desired among His people. They describe the ultimate expressions of that downward course that we generally observe in the early chapters. God graciously gave times of revival and restoration by raising judges to deliver them from the results of their sinful practices, and

these represent overcomers in those days. They moved against the normal course of events and rose above the degeneration of the times to lead the people. These represent those men who God has raised over the course of church history, who have been effective in their efforts to recover truth and to deliver God’s people.

Terminal Conditions under Samson

It is amazing that Samson was the judge who had the greatest physical potential to deliver the people, but one who failed so miserably because of the flesh. He is an illustration to us that natural, or even God-given ability, is frustrated in its purpose when the flesh is the motive or controlling influence of one’s life.

He was clearly a man who had great personal ability but no capacity nor moral authority to lead the people Godward. How often, sadly, this can be the case! Men who have the greatest ability and who have been a great help to the saints, possibly in past times, have fallen and failed under the power of the flesh within. This is, without doubt, our greatest enemy personally, and since it is unceasingly active to combat the power and work of the Spirit. However, God is able.

Samson was the only judge who dabbled with the Philistines, never seeing them as God’s enemies, but rather fighting them as his personal obstacles. His only victories gained were for himself. Sadly, the general attitude of the people was that Philistine bondage was preferable to any conflict with them that Samson might cause. The condition of compromise with the enemy had diminished their sense of the need and value for separation from the ungodly. This is always the case, and it results in generalized weakness.

Samson represented the general characteristic of the people, which was to please himself and to do what he wanted at all times. This is a sad condition, since it indicates hearts that are very far from God. Only when one’s heart is fixed on the Lord and near Him out of devotion will one be preserved from such extreme departure. However, this is especially the condition of those in the last days.

Conditions that Followed

The record indicates that following Samson’s history, the people continued to degenerate spiritually and morally. That degeneration was clearly represented in the priesthood, in which unjudged sin was tolerated. Moral evil also increased and ultimately resulted in fratricide among Israel. It is inevitable, scripturally and historically, that when men degenerate from faithfulness to the truth of God, moral degeneration will result. It seems impossible to maintain any moral standard without a solid basis in the declared and revealed will of God.

It is implied that this condition was because there was no king in Israel. Granted that this expression describes the days prior to the reign of any king, it also seems to have

a moral and spiritual connotation. But the question must be raised: did the absence of a king ever mean that God intended for every man to do that which was right in his own eyes? Hadn't God brought them out from Egypt under His leadership that was expressed in Moses? Didn't He have the intention that a theocracy, a nation that recognized God's authority and His complete capability to rule over them, would express the distinctiveness of the nation? Surely God was capable of directing and ruling over them through men that He raised, namely the priests and Levites who were responsible to guide them and teach His laws. Surely this is the case!

But we notice that the tendency for every man to do that which was right in his own eyes had been characteristic of Israel (and is of all men).

At the foot of Mt. Sinai in Exodus 32:1, in the absence of Moses, the human leader, they quickly departed from submission to divine leadership. Hear their words, "As for this Moses. . . we know not what is become of him," Their rebellious nature was further expressed in demanding that Aaron make them gods who would substitute for Jehovah, the unseen God. This was in spite of the fact that Moses had done all possible to preserve them during his absence. The tendency to want human leaders instead of yielding obedience to God, who is unseen, has plagued men, including the church, even to this day. Only the truly spiritual can look beyond men to discern and respond to the Unseen.

Subsequent Desires for Rule

Again, in the days of Gideon, they expressed their desire as they said, "Rule thou over us," (Judges 8:22). To his credit, Gideon's response was, "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you." Yet, while Gideon refused that honor, his son, Abimelech, wanted the rulership (9:1-3), and the men of Shechem were only too glad to make him their king. The ruinous result is recorded in the chapter that follow.

This tendency reached a higher point in their history when the tribes came to Samuel (1 Sam. 8:4-9) and expressed their demand to have a king so that they would be like other nations. When Samuel took the matter to the Lord, His response was, ". . . they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, where-with they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee." Historically, this was possibly about the same time as the closing days of Judges, so it would be linked with the same condition of the people. So God gave them a king that they desired, Saul, who was again a self-willed man who showed little submission of the Lord in his life or rule.

These examples illustrate the natural tendency of the human heart. When there is no human leader, men begin

to act as if there is no authority, so therefore, they tend to do what "I think" is right in their own mind. Since this is the natural course of humanity, God has instituted human government to use as instruments to carry out His will. But those who rule are responsible to God to act submissively to His authority. However, this is normally not the case.

Also, it is the normal course of the church age, for it has been the observable tendency to form organizations headed up by human leaders, and often they have established conditions in which God's rule is rejected and man is exalted.

Ideally, a local assembly is designed and intended by God to be a place where His sovereign will is obeyed and His purposes are carried out (Matt. 18:18). This is one of the distinctive aspects of an assembly that often cause visitors to wonder at the order and ask, at times, "Who is directing the order of this service, who tells different ones when to rise and what to say?" The answer they receive is part of the clear testimony of the unique character of the assembly. We profess to allow the Spirit of God to control, and it must be our exercise to allow that to be true.

Results of Failure Ignoring Divine Rule

These chapters of Judges record the sad results of this rejection. There was

Failure in Worship and Priesthood (17:6) This has been a primary point of failure in Israel and the church. It isn't enough to continue, as can be the practice, to carry on an outward form that seems right, but, as was the case in Bethel, the house of God was not there. It was an outward form but without the spiritual reality of God's presence. It was a mixture of worship of the Lord with false ideas based on self and the pagan world. This suggests conditions seen in Christendom in which there may be a claim to believe in the priesthood of believers, but with failure to carry it out in practice. In its place, a form of clergy with control has been instituted and only they are allowed to perform the functions of public priesthood.

This has resulted in the introduction of practices of ritual, sensual appeal (to flesh), outward attractiveness in order of service, candles, vestments, etc. None of this is found in the God-given pattern in the NT. We need to be careful that the absence of human authority does not cause this result. It is God's intense interest that men approach in worship on His ground, subject to His will and conditions.

Failure in Actions, no waiting on God (18:1). We see that the result was that Dan determined their own tribal movements. There was nothing wrong with wanting more territory. God intended them to do so. But they never waited on God to determine where and how to direct them. When true worship is abandoned, is it not accompanied by self-will in individual and collective actions? The normal course of the ungodly world is to act and live as if God has no place in man's affairs. This is an expression of the

rebellion against His will, and personally and collectively we must seek to guard against this tendency in any form. We really are not free to do whatever we want to do, but God intends and desires personal and practical obedience to His will.

Failure in Moral Behavior (19:1) It is sad to read or comment on this dismal record of the pattern of degeneration and subsequent evil that took place among Israel. In actual practice, they became worse than the Gentile city (Jebus) that they determined to avoid. This presents a picture of what can take place when Divine authority is ignored. What took place in Gibeah is a sad blot on the history of God's people in the Old Testament. It is only honest, intelligent allegiance to and subjection to the Lord's authority that will preserve us from becoming like the world, or even worse. Principles cannot be derived from worldly standards, assuredly not from what one might see on TV, because one can think or even entertain immorality in one's mind without actually engaging in the act. But such thoughts can lead to actions (Matt. 5:28).

Failure in Exercise of Judgment (21:25) In another sad departure from Divine authority, they asked counsel of the Lord, but in reality their mind was already made up. They never asked the right question, which is, "Should we go up against Benjamin?" but we read the direct statement, "We will," or "We will not" five times. Their words show a lack of self-judgment on their part, until they were defeated twice by the men of Benjamin. They were determined to exercise discipline against a tribe, failing to acknowledge them as "my brother" (20:23), until they had been defeated twice. This was an example of discipline carried out in the flesh that was expressed in vindictiveness and virtual extermination of a tribe in Israel.

Is it not remarkable that Israel never reacted or judged the previous spiritual evil, but now over-reacted to moral evil? Obviously, moral actions are more obvious and more easily judged and condemned than the spiritual, but it also indicates that with the spiritual condition that existed among all of them, so how could they respond properly to it?

Divine Authority in the Assembly

Some might assert that Matt. 16:19 and 18:18 teach that God acknowledges whatever decision that men in the church determine, whether it be in direct actions or in assembly discipline. Careful study of those verses reveals exactly the opposite. It is indicating that assembly actions are expected to express the mind of heaven, that in the midst of a world of self-will and rebellion, an assembly is a place where Divine authority is actually sought and recognized. It is an honor to God when His people determine and practice what is His will and act accordingly. This requires men who avidly seek to know the Word of God and thus to determine what is the scriptural action in any matter. If this is the case,

then they will have the full support of heaven, and it will result in a Christ-honoring testimony before the world.

So that it is imperative to have clear knowledge of the Scripture as it is properly interpreted in its context. In addition, an attitude of subjection to the control of the Holy Spirit is also essential. If this is true in one's personal life, we will also realize its importance in assembly life.

This is not optional, if we are to continue to know the Lord's presence in our midst. May the Lord help us so that the assembly will continue to be so for His honor.

If we allow our hearts to be tender toward God, one word from Him and we will be at His feet waiting to hear what He has to speak to us. "Samuel, Samuel," God called out. Little Samuel had a circumcised heart. He heard. He responded. When God calls your name do you respond? Do you even hear Him call?

Once we have received His affection set upon us, realized His love and calling to us, we must respond by making our heart tender toward Him. We must respond by yielding our ear, by being quick to hear and respond. We can no longer go the way of our own choosing.

Confidence

H. Thorpe

"Some trust in chariots? and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God" (Psalm 20:7).

Confidence is defined as "the state or feeling of trust in, or reliance upon another." The object of our trust may be a person or a thing. The outcome of such confidence may bring joy and security, or sorrow and desolation as there is such a thing as misplaced confidence. The above Scripture would include two classes of people—the "insecure," and the "secure." Lack of confidence is evident on every hand in the strange period of time in which we live. Rulers, governments, employers, employees, and people in general seem to be suspicious of one another's motives; and also how well Satan has succeeded in destroying the confidence that should be manifest amongst the Lord's people. As a result unrest characterizes the world and the Church.

"Some trust in chariots and some in horses," is not modern phraseology, but the heart of man is unchanged and God is displaced to make room for man and man's inventions. The word "chariot" occurs over one hundred times in the Scriptures, and

very frequently in opposition to God and to His people—man's puny strength arrayed against the power of God. It occurs only twice in the New Testament, Rev. 18:13-14, being its “finale.” Horses are often associated with chariots, but “a horse is a vain thing for safety” (Psalm 33:17). We do well to ask ourselves, what may our chariots and horses be? Possibly they are our temporal blessings, good health, steady employment, good wages, money saved, a good business investment, and such like things. These may loom up so high before us that we think our safety lies alone in the blessings with which God has so richly blessed us. With these we build fences around ourselves so that no calamity may reach us. Satan is artful, and ready to divert even God's blessings to our hurt by causing us to place our confidence in them instead of in the Giver. We do well to remember that He who gave can also sweep away such defenses, if we trust to them as such.

Our “chariots and horses,” in the Lord's work, may be numerous. It may be more dependence placed upon methods, whether old or new, than in the work of the Holy Spirit. Godly order is most desirable in the service of our Lord and Savior, but it is not sufficient in the day of trouble. The forces of hell are well organized against us. It may be a man, a gifted, eloquent, godly evangelist; but we have seen this to fail also, when our confidence was placed in the servant rather than in the Lord Himself. A comfortable and commodious building in a populous district is most desirable for the work of the Lord, but confidence in this will be futile against the enemy's attacks. The Lord's servant in the home lands, who started out in dependence on the Lord may get his eyes on Assemblies, or individuals when the “meal barrel” gets low, but this will be a failure also. The missionary far away from all his loved ones may place his confidence in some human sources in the home land. He looks forward to the arrival of a steamer: the steamer arrives; it sails away again and the missionary has cause to remember the words, “My soul wait thou only upon God, my expectation is from Him” (Psalm 62:5). God has a lesson in the disappointment; and later a ship arrives unannounced and all his needs are met. How often these lessons have to be repeated, whatever our circumstances, when we place our confidence in some other source than God.

Many “woes” are pronounced by the prophet Isaiah, but one in particular we will link with Psalm 20:7. “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord” (Isaiah 31:1). How slow we are to remember the name of the Lord our God.

What a beautiful picture we have in the life of Asa, an army of a million arrayed against him; and no less than

three hundred chariots. No doubt Zerah the Ethiopian felt very sure of success as he looked at his vast army, and horses and chariots, and compared them with Asa's. In his distress Asa remembered the name of the Lord his God.” His confidence was not misplaced. His prayer was not a long one, “Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power; help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy Name we go against this multitude. O Lord, let not man prevail against thee” (2 Chron. 14:11). Asa made God his defense: need we wonder at the result? “So the Lord smote the Egyptians before Asa.” He proved God and God gave him rest. Poor Asa, later on, put his confidence in the king of Syria instead of in the Lord, and what awful failure followed! Let us not even rely on “past experiences of victory, but in Him whom we confided during the trial, for He re-mains the same. Psalm 118:8, is the central verse in our authorized version: it is also a very significant one, and surely a rebuke to us when we turn to other sources for help. “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man”—fourteen words, and the middle words are, “the Lord.” May we get our eyes upon Him when discouraged, and when a host of troubles are arrayed against us. May we not cast away our confidence which hath great recompense of reward (Heb. 10:35). To put confidence in God honors Him, and it will be rewarded by Him. When we trust in our “chariots and horses” we slight God; and this is more serious and sinful than we may have considered it to be. Let us daily repeat to ourselves these words, “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.” Such confidence will give rest amidst unrest, for “the Lord shall be thy confidence, He shall keep thy foot from being taken.”

“The hosts of God encamp around,
The dwellings of the just.
Deliverance He affords to all
Who make His Name their trust.”

WIS May 1943

There was an old gentleman who was remarkable for his gentleness. When he was a young man, he was known to have a violent temper. He was asked how he managed to overcome his bad temper. His answer was a short but wise one. He said it was, “By praying to God and speaking low.” when persons are angry, they raise their voices and speak loudly. To overcome anger and learn the lesson of gentleness, we must, “pray to God and speak low.”

The Imminence of His Coming.

W. J. McClure

(This article, written many years ago, has references to events now in the past, but the truth remains, Ed.)

Certain signs have materialized within the last few years which tell to all who are sufficiently awake to have marked them, that we are just on the verge of His coming. To three of these signs we shall refer briefly ; and we commend them to the sober study of the reader. They are: (1) The Apostasy. (2) The revival and spread of Spiritism. (3) The present state of the Jews.

Apostasy

First then the Apostasy. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3 and 2 Timothy 4:1 we have this sign spoken of. It is exemplified in the present revolt against the truth of God's word. 1 Timothy 4:1 does not so much refer to cults like Russellism, Christian Science, Christadelphianism, or Adventism. These never had the truth, and so could not "depart from" it. The departure referred to must be that of those who once held and taught the fundamentals of the faith. Who could have believed it a generation ago that the pulpits and theological chairs of Evangelical Churches would soon be filled by men who would deny the account of creation given in Genesis, regarding it as an allegory but not history? Yet this is now the case on every hand. They boldly declare that man was not put in the garden in the prime of mental and physical vigor, but was evolved from cosmic dust, through many stages up to that of the monkey, and thence eventually reached his present level. And since he thus came up there is of course no Fall, and as the Lord Jesus believed in the Fall, and in the creation as well, He is thereby proved to be a man of but limited intelligence Who held and taught the doctrines of His day because He knew no better. Thus we have His Deity flatly denied And upon this there follows naturally the denial of His virgin birth, of the vicarious nature of His death, of the reality of His resurrection, and of the fact of His coming again, as well as of the truth of eternal punishment, and of the full inspiration of the Bible. Such then is the apostasy of 2 Thessalonians 2, the departure from the faith of 1 Timothy 4: and so general has it now become amongst denominations once evangelical that the Editor of The Witness and Canadian Homestead, published in Montreal, estimates that about 90 per cent of theologians accept the results of modernism. While this saddens the heart of the true believer, on the other hand it proclaims the nearness of our redemption; and it should stir the unsaved, whose attention has been called to it, to delay no longer, but enter ere the Master of the house rises and shuts the door, thus closing salvation's day.

Spiritism

The second sign is the revival and spread of Spiritism.

About a century ago, the precious truth of the coming of the Lord to the air for His people was recovered after a long period during which it had been practically forgotten. Its recovery was one of the greatest blessings that God's people have known in recent times, and it would be impossible to overrate what it has meant in the way of comfort and cheer to believers. But just about the same time Satan brought into prominence something as fraught with evil as the other was with blessing. It was the revival of Spiritism in the home of the Fox sisters in the State of New York in 1834. From that crude beginning of spirit-rapping a mighty system has developed, until, instead of being practiced covertly, and those who did so being regarded with suspicion, now the great ones of the land in their thousands are carried away with it. How the change came about was this. Certain men of prominence wished to investigate the phenomena connected with it, and instead of turning to God's Word, where they could have found out all about it, and learned its devilish origin, they trusted to their own wisdom, and as a result of their investigations came to the conclusion not only that Spiritism was real but that it was something desirable. Among these men were Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir William Crookes. The fact that such men stamped it with a scientific character has now made Spiritism popular, and high and low are deceived by its Satanic delusion. So quickly has it spread that there are by this time over 1,500 Spiritist Churches in the British Isles, while in America it has reached from coast to coast. Now what is the significance of all this? When our Lord came to earth to die there was great activity in the demon world, as the Gospels plainly show. Now, on the eve of His coming again, Satan, aware that this coming will challenge his rule over the hearts of men, is marshaling his forces to hold his kingdom; and thus we have this revival of Spiritism after centuries during which it seemed to be checked, at least in lands where the Gospel was preached. By Spiritism he is darkening the minds of men and preparing them for the reception of the Antichrist. The last days are evidently upon us, and 1 Timothy 4:1 gives us the true source of the soul-destroying errors of modernism, of which we have already spoken. They are "doctrines of demons." By many this sign may have been unnoticed, which is just what Satan desires; but it proclaims in unmistakable tones that the close of the day of salvation is at hand.

The Jews

Our third sign is the present state of the Jews. Of the three mentioned, it is doubtless the most easily read, and should appeal to all. We have three passages in the Gospels in which the fig tree is prominently mentioned, and each illustrates the Jews as a nation. They are Luke 13:6-9; Matthew 21:19; 24:32, 33. The first mentioned shows us Israel fruitless and about to come under the judgment of

God. But Christ intercedes for them, and judgment is averted for a short time. In the second we see what happened in A.D. 70, when for continued fruitlessness God's judgment fell on them, and they were scattered by the Romans, who destroyed their city, bringing to an end their political and religious life, like the withering leaves of the tree which the Lord had cursed. Eighteen hundred years have rolled away, and Israel has remained as separate and distinct from other nations as when they were first sent out of their land to be like Cain "a fugitive and a vagabond . . . in the earth." Do we realize what a wonderful thing this is? Eighteen hundred years during which, despite untold sufferings, they have preserved their racial identity and characteristics; and yet through all these centuries they had had no national existence. Like the smitten fig tree, national life seemed dead. But in our third passage the fig tree is seen putting forth its leaves. What is the meaning of this? Let us look at the present state of the Jews and we shall see. Within our own memories a tremendous change has come over that people. For the first time in eighteen centuries this national life is manifesting itself. The long dormant national consciousness has awakened; the tree that was bare is putting forth its leaves, and we hear of Zionist Conferences and Zionist Congresses. The Jew is turning to Palestine, not to be a stranger there under an alien Government but to raise up a separate Jewish State. The land is being brought under cultivation: Jerusalem has taken on the appearance of a modern city; and on the very site where Titus had his tent pitched to watch his army capture the city there now stands a Jewish University to fit the Jewish youth for the responsibilities of business and government.

Of the various tokens of the nearness of Christ's coming, this is probably the most striking and conclusive. See how our Lord uses it. "Now from the fig tree learn her parable. When her branch is become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh: even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know that He is near, even at the doors" (Matthew 24:32, 33, R.V.). He is at the doors. This is what the present state of the Jews proclaims to all who have ears to hear. Never, since the blessed hope was recovered, have the signs of the imminence of His coming been so strikingly manifest as now; and that God has allowed it so to be, may well, on the one hand, lead believers to rejoice in the nearness of their redemption, and on the other hand startle sinners out of their indifference, since His coming will usher in their day of judgment. What it will mean for them we find in 2 Thessalonians 2:7-9, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God; and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power."

In 2 Peter 3:4 we have what might perhaps be called another sign that the coming is at hand: the fact of the ungodly denying it, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Do not we hear this on every side to-day, thus confirming us that the time draws near. And conditions which obtain at present, both in the professing Church and in the world, all tell the same story. The rapidity with which things are moving away from God indicates that we are in the very last days, and that judgment must soon sweep this guilty scene. "When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are; then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets. But He shall say, I tell you, I know you not, whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13:25-28). In view of this swiftly approaching moment, we urge the reader to accept Christ without delay. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

How can one walk in communion with Christ in heaven and not come in collision with the world? Do I walk as one who is in present, living intercourse with the heart of Christ, having my heart formed and fashioned by the constant apprehension of His glory? And if so, how can I be conformed to the world? Do you believe that Christ is not ashamed to confess your name to the Father, as one whom He has apprehended for glory? Oh, is there no divine fulness, nothing unsearchable, connected with the love that says, "How are you walking? Is it as one who is reaching forth and pressing on for the mark?" If I am called to give up certain things, to be separate from certain things, is it sorrow to me or joy, under the eye of Christ who is leading me on into glory with Himself?