

To "... strengthen the things which remain..." Revelation 3:2

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3RD JOHN

Larry Steers

All believers love the writings of John. He was the son of Zebedee (Matthew 4:11) and his brother was James. The Lord surnamed them "Boanerges", which by interpretation means "the sons of thunder" (Matthew 3:17). This may suggest that as fishermen laboring with their father, they were boisterous and loud. John's brother, James, was the first of the early disciples to experience martyrdom at the hands of King Herod (Matthew 10:2).

As a follower of the Lord, John's life was changed. From a "son of thunder" he became the Apostle of love. Because of this, it appears that there was a special relationship between the Lord and John. John was the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23, 21:20).

As John wrote the five Books attributed to him, he was the last surviving apostle and a man of deep spiritual experience.

John was a profoundly devout man who was given to hospitality. When, at the cross (John 19:25-27), the Lord commended Mary into the hands of John, He knew she would be well cared for. The receiver of this brief letter, Gaius, was converted through the labors of John. He refers to Gaius as one of my children (v. 4). The spiritual character of John is seen in the life of his son in the faith.

We see four men in John's third epistle. There is Gaius to whom John addresses his letter, a man named Diotrephes (v. 9), a Demetrius (v. 12), and John himself (v. 13 to 14). These four men may be looked at as:

Gaius – A Devoted Man
Diotrephes – A Domineering Man
Demetrius – A Dependable Man
John – A Diplomatic Man

Gaius was one of the most common names in the Roman Empire. Several men in the Word of God bear this name, namely Gaius of Macedonia (Acts 19:29), Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4), and Gaius of Corinth (1Cor. 1:14). Likely the Gaius to whom John was writing was not one of these three.

We will notice the first half of this one-chapter epistle under a number of headings.

The Elder Who Writes, v. 1

The word "elder" here is the Greek word "PRESBUTEROS." Paul uses the same word in 1 Timothy 5:1 "Rebuke not an elder." The context would indicate that "the elder" is an older man, and it would be improper for a younger brother to sharply rebuke an older brother. The Holy Spirit is teaching respect for age in the first two verses of 1 Timothy 5.

The same word, elder, appears again in the same chapter in v. 17 but in an entirely different context. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour". The elder here is an overseer, a shepherd in the assembly. Note the word again in v. 19 "Against an elder receive not an accusation but before two or three witnesses."

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Three of the apostles appear to have functioned for a short time as elders. Peter writes "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder" (1 Peter 5:1). Paul refers to James, Cephas and John as "pillars" (Galatians 2:9) in the assembly at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1). In this third letter of John he writes, having had the experience of an elder. He was also an older man in his 90's with a depth of spiritual knowledge. We should thank God for the zeal of younger brethren moving out with the Gospel but they should give ear to older brethren with years of spiritual experience. One has said, "same is safe". Younger brethren must be very careful when it comes to introducing new ideas without consulting elders and older servants of the Lord.

Esteem for Gaius

John addresses Gaius as "well beloved" four times (verses 1,2,5 and 11). Any brother loving the assembly like this devoted man would be greatly esteemed by God. There is a very great need in our day for the Holy Spirit to raise up brethren among the assemblies who have the character of Gaius.

But those in assembly fellowship where Gaius was would have a deep appreciation for him, who had been wounded and broken by a domineering, ruthless Diotrephes. Gaius's door would be open to minister to their wounds, to bind up the broken spirits and to encourage the discouraged.

John's love for this man was not hypocritical but was genuine. The RV reads "whom I love in truth" (v. 1). John practiced what he had previously written, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue: but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

Entreaty for Gaius

The word "wish" (EUCHOMAI) is translated "pray" in 2 Corinthians 13:7, and in James 5:16. It might have a greater significance by being rendered "pray" as the Revised Version translates. John has Gaius much in his prayers; he writes "above" or "concerning all things." Gaius is in the midst of trying circumstances. Even today overseers who are seeking the preservation of assembly testimony need the prayers of faithful believers.

John's entreaty for Gaius is three fold. He touches the material need of Gaius when he writes, "that thou mightest prosper." The same word is found in 1 Corinthians 16:2 where we are exhorted to "lay by him in store as God hath prospered him." Why would John pray this for Gaius? As indicated above Gaius would use the resources God gave him for the encouragement and blessing of the saints.

John also prays, "and be in health", that is to be healthy, sound and physically fit. Assembly problems have had a detrimental affect on the health of many a faithful elder. A man like Diotrephes would cause havoc and eventually destroy the testimony.

The third aspect of John's prayer is more a note of thanksgiving as he writes, "even as thy soul prospereth". Spiritual growth and development must have priority in the life of a believer. So often there is the occupation with material things, which have no eternal value. Our Lord said: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6: 33). Gaius had put the Lord first in his life, had grown in grace and could now be a help to troubled souls.

Exercise of Gaius, v.3-4 as reported to John by others.

"The brethren" were evidently travelers. Several of them had been entertained, provided for, and fed spiritually by Gaius. "Came" is a present participle and indicates a continuous coming. These visitors who had spent time in the home of Gaius brought a three fold report, which caused John to rejoice greatly.

First, they spoke of the truth which was in Gaius. How is truth possessed? There is a need for much time in prayer spent in the presence of God. While we sing "Oh the pure delight of a single hour which before Thy throne we spend", is this an accurate reflection of our time spent before the Throne of Grace?

Second, truth indwells the believer because of prayerful meditation on the Word of God. This will never be evident in the life of a Christian who, as an obligation, reads a chapter in the morning and a chapter at night. For the Scriptures to dwell in a believer richly it must be read, memorized, and meditated upon.

Third, truth must be practiced. The report reaching the ears of John concerning Gaius was "even as thou walkest in the truth" (v.3). Many likely know more than they practice. John's response is how any herald of the Gospel would react when he heard a report that his son in the faith was going on. John rejoiced. One rendering is "What happiness it gave me". He not only rejoiced but he rejoiced greatly, very exceedingly.

Others have pointed out that the noun "joy" in v.4 is not found in 1 Corinthians but the noun and verb forms are found 13 times in 2 Corinthians. Paul was greatly concerned about conditions at Corinth in his first epistle. The second epistle indicates a measure of recovery, and resulted in Paul's increased joy. There is a special joy which floods the soul of the Gospel herald when professing converts make spiritual progress. Paul could write to the Thessalonians "For ye are our glory and joy" (1 Thessalonians 2:20).

Every God-sent Evangelist is filled with joy when a sinner receives Christ. He becomes a father to those young converts. Paul reminds us as he writes to the Corinthians "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:15). "Joy" in v.4 is a possessive subjective pronoun and indicates "my own", that is John's joy. Here again Gaius, John's own son in the faith, by his spiritual progress brought that greater joy to the heart of John and led John to write "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (v.4). "Walk" is the habitual walk of one's life.

So often we count numbers at the conclusion of a series of Gospel meetings; however, when the area is visited a short time later those who professed have vanished. This may suggest they were never really saved, but it may also indicate a failure to teach and shepherd young converts.

Will you allow me just for a moment to challenge my younger brethren who are engaged full time in the Lord's work. God gives you a great opportunity in your youth to labor for Him in an area making proclaiming to sinners the unsearchable riches of the Lord you love. When your labors are blessed and a few

souls are saved, you are their father in the faith. As a father you sit down with them, teach them and rejoice to see them growing in their spiritual life. This tremendous, rewarding experience will add weight to your ministry to the saints in the years ahead of you until the Lord comes.

Example of Gaius

a) His Ministry v.5 "Thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest".

Whatever responsibility was placed into the hands of this devoted brother was faithfully and prayerfully fulfilled. He could be trusted, was reliable, sincere to fulfill diligently "whatever" was entrusted to him. This was demonstrated by his love to the brethren and some were total strangers. We are reminded of the words of the Lord, "Verily I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me and he that receiveth me receiveth Him that sent me" (John 13:20). And again "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25: 40). What a privilege to entertain the saints of God. What an honor, "Ye have done it unto Me".

These brethren traveled from Gaius to John and brought with them a good commendation of a faithful servant of Christ. Every exercised believer would surely cry earnestly to God that devoted men like Gaius would be raised up among us.

b) Further Manifestations of His Ministry

It is to be carefully noted that Gaius was quiet about his service and exercise. The reports John received were from others. Many came to John, each bringing the same report of the faith of Gaius, his love and hospitality. He is commended for his charity. While the word is AGAPE, perhaps the translation "charity" is not far off. This was a love produced in the heart of a yielded saint by the Holy Spirit and was manifested by its acts. This is a sacrificial love, not talk but do.

Church, "EKKLESIA," is the assembly where John was. The word identifies a number of believers who are meeting in assembly capacity, separated from the world and gathered in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. These

travelers had experienced in the assembly were John was (perhaps Ephesus), what had been absent in the heart of Diotrephes.

To bring forward on their journey implies that Gaius helped at the commencement of their continuing travel, providing provision and accompanying them for a distance. The expression implies an accomplished fact and could be rendered "having sent forward".

These whom Gaius helped had gone forth for His Name's sake, having been filled by the Holy Spirit with a missionary burden. Committed to the service of the Lord they looked only to Him for provision and would take nothing from the Gentiles. Their faith looked to an unfailling God to provide for their daily need.

c) Encouragement of John v.8

Rather than an exhortation and in view of the first eight versus of the chapter, this would seem more of an encouragement to Gaius to continue what he had already been doing.

A practical word may be suggested here. When an Assembly or an individual believer provides financial support, or by providing hospitality and kindness to the Lord's servants, they are "fellowhelpers" in his work and labourers for the Lord. An elderly sister and her two mites makes an investment in and is sharing in his service. She will get her reward at the Bema. Brethren, are we thankful for the widow's support? This writer responds thankfully with a letter to every sister for her prayer and for her fellowship.

I have said it many a time, and am surer of it than ever, that the life and death issue of Christianity is the inspiration and authority of the Bible.

Overseers

In our last paper we were noticing the character of men who were appointed to be judges, or overseers of the people under the law; and while all could not be able men, all could be men fearing God, men of truth, hating covetousness; in fact, if they were not, then they were criminals to be brought before the judges, who were to hear the causes, and to judge righteously between every man and his broth-

er. "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," Deuteronomy 1:17. They were not to respect the person of the poor, not honor the person of the mighty. Anything but justice was to be abhorred, "He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him. But to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them," Proverbs 24:24-25. Friendship must not influence the judge; neither must pity for the poor, nor intimidation from the strong: God was behind them to defend them, and they must act for Him. Cases might arise that were too *hard* for them, but no case was too hard for Him.

When sentence was passed it must be carried out. "According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do, thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand nor to the left. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken to the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die, and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously," Deuteronomy 17:11-13. All this is in strict accordance with government under Law.

Overseers Under Grace

The law having failed to produce righteousness; and the Lord Jesus having exposed the depths of iniquity in man's heart, (see Matthew 5: 21-48), a righteousness far surpassing that produced by the law, in infinite grace through the sacrifice of Calvary, provides not only a perfect righteousness for the sinner, but also a new power to enable the saint for his walk through the world. "There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin,

condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," Romans 8:1-4. The flesh having been judged and put to one side as incurably bad, God now looks upon His own as in the Spirit; the possessors of a new life which they received when born again. He binds these newborn ones into a new organization, the Church, of which He, not Moses, is the Head, "that great Shepherd of the sheep," Hebrews 13:20. True overseers are under-shepherds, just as the judges in Israel were under-judges holding offices under Moses. We emphasize the word offices, for that is what belonged to the judges under the law. They were officers of law. But the judges have passed away, and their offices have passed away with them. This is a fact of immense importance to grasp for failing to see the difference of dispensations Christians return to legality and to seeking honorable offices in the church. And the flesh can rise no higher than the law and so wherever it acts men rise no higher than seeking some office in the Assembly. The dispute "by the way" was as to "which of them should be accounted the greatest." In other words, which of them would be ruler over thousands: they were not much concerned about who would be over the tens. What a rebuke the Lord's answer was! "And He said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that cloth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth," Luke 22:24-27. "Whosoever will be great among you let him be your minister (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," Matthew 20:27-28.

True overseers are forbidden to lord it over God's heritage: they are to be ensamples to the flock. Oversight is not an office bringing worldly ease, or honor, but a service that calls for lowly labor, making the overseer servant of all, after the pattern of the Master. "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ,

and a partaker of the glory which shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away," 1 Peter 5:1-4. No hireling, nor office seeker, nor man with an empty basket, or false gift, or ease-lover need apply for a position under the chief Shepherd. Such are but blind mouths,—seeing nothing, and feeding themselves instead of feeding the sheep.

"This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop ("desire oversight"—"the office of" should be left out) He desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless (without reproach, R.V.), the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil," 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

The Lord's people sometimes speak of this as some unattainable standard; just why is hard to understand. It is not hard to find many Christians who measure up to it in the eyes of their fellow men, and that is the standpoint viewed here. Ruling his own house we take to mean while under his government, not after they have grown up and scattered. The question is asked, How shall he take care of the church of God? The only other occurrence of the words "take care" is found in Luke 10:34-35, where the good Samaritan said, "Take care of him." Loving service, and not domineering lordship is the thought. This is the kind of oversight that makes room for itself: in fact it cannot be suppressed. Who can hinder a godly man from visiting the sick; ministering to the needy; reading and praying with them; seeking out the backsliders for restoration; teaching

and showing the right ways of God, and all such like things.

When oversight service degenerates into officialism, as alas it too frequently does, then men begin to fight for office, and think themselves overseers because they look after the correspondence of the Assembly, or the funds, or some other business activity. This is altogether a false idea: a going back to Judaism: a seeking for the office of judge: and flesh is soon fighting flesh for who will be the greatest, and the sheep and lambs are scattered. Not that it is inconsistent for true overseers to look after these services; but it is not attending "business meetings" that constitutes an overseer. Officialism leads into a kind of religious politics; and wire pulling of all kinds is practiced by those who want office. or want to keep office, and party foments against party to forward the interests of their favorite leader. Oh, for more of the spirit of the Master who came not to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many! Oh, for more under-shepherds to have a godly care for the flock!

The Christian listens to the tick of an astronomical clock, knowing that the centuries are God's, whatever the years seem to say. And because there is God, he can wait.

Whole or Half?

Joel Portman

Very few in history could truly say, as David did in Psalm 138:1, "I will praise thee with my whole heart." There have been those who could say the words, but they were not substantiated by their life. David said what he meant, and he meant what he said. Men might point out failures and sin in his life, but the overall character of David's life showed that he was a person who responded to the Lord's desire, when He said in Deuteronomy 5:29, "O, that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" Or, who expressed the words of the scribe in Mark

12:33, that "to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." The greatest curse of God's people in any day, and that which the Lord hates, is the condition of half-heartedness, in which there is some love for the Lord, but it is not expressed by entire devotion of heart, soul, and life to Him.

As another has said, the sad condition that exists in Christendom today, and which has been a curse among testimony at all times, is the use of words that are essentially hypocritical and empty, without them truly corresponding to the life of the speaker. It was the condition that Hosea addresses in his condemnation of Ephraim (the 10 northern tribes of Israel), when the Lord said that "Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit. . ." (Hosea 11:12). Words spoken in their worship were empty, useless and hateful to the Lord, who desired lives that expressed genuine devotion to Him. Jeremiah, speaking to the southern kingdom of Judah, equally condemned them because they had not "turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly (in falsehood), saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 3:10). This condition of Israel resulted in the northern kingdom being taken away into captivity early with the tribe of Judah following later.

Halfheartedness in the Church

This condition didn't cease with the nation of Israel, but it is what the Lord condemns in the letter to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. The first one, Ephesus, had been signally blessed by the Lord and had borne clear testimony to the truth. Early days of their first love had been marked by their burning the books of idolatry (Acts 19:19), and Paul prays in Ephesians 3:18-21 that they might be "rooted and grounded in love" and that they might be able to comprehend "the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge. . ." But with clarity the Lord addresses them in Revelation 2, praising them for their orthodoxy to truth, their labor, suffering, carefulness, and refusal of evil, but He condemns them for the fact that they had left (abandoned, sent away) their first love. Evi-

dently, other objects had come into their lives that they desired more than the love that they displayed at the first (at the beginning seems to be the thought, but which was possibly their best). It was inevitable in the history of church testimony that such lukewarmness would terminate in the condition of Laodicea, "neither cold or hot. . . lukewarm." (3:15-16). That is the condition that we face and must reject in our lives today, for it is the prevalent attitude that it is commendable to become enthusiastic about a team of men pushing an oblong ball over a line, or putting a round ball through a net, but one is a fanatic and dangerous if they are excited about salvation and its blessings, living for Christ, and its potential, separation from the world and its pleasures, etc. Hymns abound about loving the Lord, and we sing heartily, "Oh, how I love Jesus. . ." and "My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou are mine. . ." but we wonder how much of that carries over into lives that are truly devoted to Him and excited about His presence and service each day that we live.

Another has said again, that sadly, many who claim to be backsliders in heart have likely never been truly converted. The professing church is full of them, and as the Lord says to Sardis, they have a "name to live and art dead." (3:1).

What is Required?

Total commitment of the entire person to the Lord! Psalm 119, a psalm without an inscription to indicate its author, refers to the "whole heart" six times. This psalm expresses one's attitude to the Word of God in various aspects, and it may indicate why there is not more wholehearted commitment to the Lord. When there is neglect of God's Word, it is impossible to say that one is committed to Him. Lack of daily reading and meditating on God's precious Word indicates a lack of appreciation for Him who wrote it and for the truth that it conveys. A Bible-centered life is essential to a life of holy and godly separation to the Lord that flows from heart devotion to Him. Those who neglect regular reading of God's Word, end up using it only as a resource from which to draw material for speaking or teaching others, but they fail to fill their hearts and minds with its truth.

The Lord revealed to Ezekiel (33:31-32), that the people came to him and outwardly seemed to want to hear the words that he spoke, but the Lord said that they had no intention to do them. "With their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after covetousness." That outward enthusiasm is reflected in the parable of the sower and the seed in Matthew 13, where some seed fell on stony ground and demonstrated quick results, but they didn't last. Other fell among thorns that resulted in no fruit. The testing of the sun's heat and the competition of the thorns robbed the sower of receiving any fruit.

Paul wrote that God was his witness, "whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son. . ." (Romans 1:9). He was serving the Lord with his entire being. It was more than an occupation, it was his life. He truly could write from imprisonment in Rome to the believers in Philippi, that, "for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21). His life was Christ. Jack Hunter used to say in his ministry, that if you took Christ out of Paul's life, he had nothing left! How true! From the first day when he met the Lord on the road toward Damascus, he lived with a powerful desire to "know Him," and to do His will. His two questions on that occasion reflect the entire character of his life: "Who art thou, Lord?" and "What wilt thou have me to do?"

Why is "half-heartedness" wrong?

1. It is Unworthy of God. He deserves far more and expects far more. His greatness, who He is, and what He expects demands more from those who bear His holy Name. Anything less is dishonoring to Him. It shows that He doesn't occupy the place that He should have in one's life. It shows that while there might be some room for Him in the heart, His presence is crowded out by other objects that seek to supplant His position. He is only One among many other loves in that person.

He declares that He is a jealous God and won't share His glory and honor with another (Exodus 34:14, and five other passages). Other "gods" of this world always seek to compete with Him and dislodge Him from His position of preeminence that He should rightfully occupy in the hearts of men, but He won't allow that.

2. It is Unhealthy for a Christian. It expresses hypocrisy and deceit, that results in lives that are unsatisfying, not joyful, not productive, not consistent with words spoken. This is harmful to the person who tries to pretend in certain circumstances that he loves the Lord with all his heart, but in reality, that pretension is not supported by his life. It results in him being frustrated, self-condemned, and with a heart that gradually becomes hardened. His testimony is undermined, so that he cannot bear witness with positive energy by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is grieved, for He lusteth over a believer with a jealousy according to God (Galatians 5:17, James 4:5). His desire is to have the entire person devoted to the Lord as it should be. Paul again could say, "the life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 3:20). It is the life in the flesh where we have our problems. The life in this body is where reality is tested and demonstrated. It is the life that is either yielding to the control of the Spirit, or it is allowing the attractions of the flesh and its tendencies to prevail. Paul lived, "in the flesh," by the faith of the Son of God. Living by faith is essentially and fundamentally, taking what we believe concerning Christ and letting it control our life. This is as it should be. May it be true in our lives entirely!

This life of wholly following the Lord, as Caleb could say concerning himself, is what the Lord desires of us. He truly wants believers in Him who live to demonstrate a genuine response to His purposes and desires.

This life is also what He deserves to receive. Anything less is not what we should give, considering who He is, what HE has done and is doing, and in contrast to what we are in ourselves apart from Him and His work.

One receives much from such a life in this world. In addition, He will not fail to reward all who live a life devoted to Him. It is eternity in view, along with our relative positions in His kingdom, and the privilege of great participation in the act of rendering glory and honor to His blessed Person in the glory.

The world may think one to be a fool for this, but the world knows little of genuine reality before God. May we not live like the world or according to its principles! It is the

world to come that we are living for, and may we display that ambition now.

Do not ask for the vision on the Mount. God takes there whomever He wills. The light of the transfiguration creates responsibility; the men who saw its glory were also taken to its sorrows.

Railing, pt 2

Robert Surgenor

REASONS FOR EXCOMMUNICATION

There are a number of reasons why excommunication is carried out by the assembly. (1) To vindicate the name of Christ. (2) To maintain holiness in the assembly. (3) To warn others in the assembly the consequences of certain sins. (4) To deliver the wicked person into the realm of Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that they might repent of their sin and be restored to the fellowship of the assembly.

Putting away is not a "one way ticket" to permanently get rid of a person. The assembly's desire should always be the restoration of the offending person with a view of coming back into the fellowship.

I remember sitting in the circle one Lord's Day morning and the announcement was made regarding the disciplining of a brother, and the whole assembly broke out into tears. Ah, that' it, a contrite spirit and tears. That' how it should be, but that' not often the case. How often is arrogance, a hard spirit, bitterness, and revenge seen when disciplining a precious saint. How such an attitude must grieve the tender heart of our blessed Lord.

Dealing Unjustly

There have been cases where jealousy has been the motive in excommunicating a person. There are men that cannot stand to see another person more popular than themselves, or more capable than they, and if that be the case in the life of a jealous person in the place of power, often the so called "threat" is accused of railing and put away.

In the case of one being excommunicated, the first thing before restoration to the fellowship of the assembly can be effected is that the offender repent of his sin. However, with a falsely accused person, how can they repent of a sin that they have never committed? It is impossible, thus there is no hope of that person ever coming back into the assembly. In other words, they have given him a "one way ticket," which, of course, is opposed to the whole reason for dealing with an offender, for the object of severe discipline, in all cases, should be restoration.

The Scripture has stated in Proverbs 27:4, that; "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy"(jealousy). Proverbs 14:30 states that envy is "the rottenness of the bones." An envious man in an assembly is a very dangerous man. Many such men are very subtle, working silently behind the scenes to accomplish their purpose in destroying any person who stands in their way. They work insidiously, seeking to destroy the testimony of an innocent person to accomplish their own end. They whisper in the ears of ignorant saints insinuations against their "enemy," seeking to defame them, and destroy their sterling character in the eyes of any that will listen. They store up their false accusations against a person so that the sin of railing might be brought against the innocent person. In reality though, the accusing whisperer is the one guilty of railing. For that is one of the man aspects of railing, namely, the constant activity of defaming one in the eyes of others.

All of us who defend the truth have the responsibility to object to things that are in error. The voicing of disapproval is scriptural. Paul commanded Timothy to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." (2 Tim. 4:2). Elders even have the responsibility to keep from the speaking platform any man that would lead the saints astray with erroneous doctrine. Strange to say though, there have been responsible men in assemblies that have been accused of railing because of their objections to certain unscriptural activities. One elder was accused of railing because he was not favorable to the preaching of a visiting evangelist. He felt the preaching was of such a nature

as to produce false professions. However, even though he and others were not in favor of the series of meetings, they faithfully attended all of them with their families. There was a man behind the scenes that had arranged the meetings. This subtle man had in years past been the leading element in having a local brother, and an elder in a distant assembly, excommunicated for railing, for they stood in his way. He now had another Christian to attack, the man who had objected to the preaching of the visiting evangelist. The accused was a man who had donated a great sum of money for the betterment of the gathering. He was a man who had his house in order, whose children faithfully attended every meeting of the assembly, most of them Christians. This man was in demand by other assemblies for spiritual help, but sad to say, he was a threat to the subtle man who had already orchestrated the removal of two men for supposedly railing. The day came when the bow was drawn and the arrow flew. The well-liked brother with the godly family was "called on the carpet" for questioning. However, he was never given the opportunity to answer in his own defense. The world terms this a "kangaroo court." A few days later he received a letter in the mail informing him that he had been excommunicated for railing. A few charges were contained in the letter, and he was warned never to set foot on the property of the hall without their permission. In other words, we do not want you back. The brother was devastated, and others were too, with the result that about half of the saints in that assembly left.

Years ago brother William Warke was confronted by some Christians. They asked him, "When a group leaves the gospel hall and forms an assembly elsewhere, what group is the true assembly, the ones still in the hall, or the ones that left? Here is what he replied: "the true assembly are the ones that are carrying out the word of God in the gathering."

Thus we see that calling a building a "Gospel Hall" does not necessarily make the people gathering inside a scriptural assembly. As said, an assembly is a gathering of believers to the Lord's name that are carrying out the commandments of the Lord relative to the testimony formed by that particular company

of believers.

An Overnight Takeover

Many years ago one Lord's Day morning, in another country, when the elders of a certain assembly came to their gospel hall they were greeted by a group of younger men at the door who informed them that they had taken control and were the new oversight. These crafty individuals were in the majority. They had gotten rid of the Believer's Hymn Book for a more modern hymnal, and informed the older men that there were going to be changes. The result was that all the older saints left, gave up the building and met elsewhere. Let me ask you, what group was God's scripturally-gathered assembly, the ones meeting in the gospel hall, or the ones who were forced to leave to meet elsewhere?

Volcanic Ashes

When Mount Saint Helen erupted many years ago, two weeks later the ash from that tremendous explosion began to fall from the sky, over 2,500 miles away in West Virginia. When there is an eruption in an assembly, unfortunately the ashes are carried great distances and fall on other assemblies. This should not be, but sadly this is often the case, especially when the one put away was put away unjustly.

To further their agenda, and to cover their mistrial of an accused, but innocent, person, the accusers will continue to spread derogatory reports about the innocent victim who was excommunicated. This basically is railing. A serious problem arises though when these slanderous reports are taken as truth, without ever hearing the other side of the story. Sometimes the Lord's servants are caught up in the affair, and may even be threatened by an assembly oversight that if they seek to help the wrongly accused they will be cut off by their assembly. This is what is called in the world, coercing, or, intimidation.

Elders and the Diligent Inquisition

On one occasion an assembly heard of a man that had been put away for railing, and that others had left with him. This particular assembly had men of understanding and wisdom, and when they heard what had taken place, a few

elders from that assembly took the time to make the long journey to the assembly that had put away this particular brother. They acted upon a divine principle, quoted in two portions of the Bible. (1) "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" (John 7:51). These were the words of Nicodemus in his defense for Christ before the hating Pharisees.

(2) Deuteronomy 19:16-1 states; "If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong; Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days; And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you. And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

One can plainly see the divine principle here. The accused was maintaining his innocence. This drew the attention to a governing body of men who were priests and judges. These men were totally impartial. Through diligent inquisition, both sides of the story were brought before them. They could not condemn the accused without concrete evidence produced by the accuser, thus both parties were examined before a verdict was reached.

Questions were asked by the inquiring brethren, and conflicting reports were given by the accusers of the assembly that had put the man away for railing. These same inquiring brethren also met with the newly formed group that had left and heard their testimonies. After prayer, the investigating brethren came to the conclusion that the assembly that had so harshly dealt with the brother had no probable cause for excommunicating him. He had been dealt with unjustly. The inquiring brethren also perceived that some statements from the accusers were not exactly correct but rather twisted, and that these brethren were somewhat evasive and uneasy over the "diligent

inquisition.”

Upon visiting the other gathering, they were warmly welcomed, and were greatly impressed with the sincerity and openness of the saints. With the group that had been forced to leave, they could find no scriptural fault warranting excommunication. That group had met for many months for prayer and Bible study in a brother's home, seeking to keep close to the Lord. Finally, after much exercise before the Lord they began to break bread on the Lord's Days. The inquiring elders returned to their own assembly enlightened to the whole scenario that had taken place. A week later, each of those visiting elders received a warm letter of gratitude from the newly-formed assembly, thanking them for coming and encouraging them with words of wisdom. The excommunicating assembly never thanked the inquiring brethren for coming. Were they resentful? One cannot judge, but God knows.

One more thing regarding these inquiring men. One of those men has speaking ability and has been invited to various assemblies to preach the gospel. What would you think if a distant assembly, who valued this man, would suddenly inform him that he was no longer allowed to visit them with a word from the Lord because he had visited the new assembly; worse yet, their judgment being based on the word of some whisperer, yet they themselves never having sent a few responsible brethren to make "diligent inquisition" of both sides? I would term that either irresponsibility or prejudice.

If the accusers spread their slander to other assemblies, the assembly that hears the report has no right to reach a verdict until they personally have a heart to heart talk with both gatherings. The court system in the United States could never condemn a man before a trial. No assembly has the right to condemn a man without an impartial trial. It is true that every assembly is autonomous, and is responsible to answer only to the Lord for its activities. However, when an assembly spreads slanderous reports abroad, it is automatically involving other assemblies, placing upon those assemblies the responsibility to hold their own trial by "diligent inquisition," before they can righteously pass judgment on the accused.

(continued)

To Every Man His Work

Selected

The Lord has given to every man his work. It is his business to do it, and the devil's business to hinder him—if he can. So, sure as God gives a man a work to do, Satan will try to hinder him. He may present other things more promising; he may allure you by worldly prospect; he may assault you with slander, torment you with false accusations, set you to work defending your character, employ pious persons to lie about you, editors to assail you, and excellent men to slander you. You may have Pilate and Herod, Ananias and Caiaphas all combined against you, and Judas standing by to sell you for 30 pieces of silver. And you may wonder why all these things have come to pass. Can you not see that the whole thing is brought about through the craft of the devil, to draw you off from your work and hinder your obedience to Christ? Keep about your work. Do not flinch because the lion roars. Do not stop to stone the devil's dogs. Do not fool around your time chasing the devil's rabbits. Do your work; let liars lie; let sectarians quarrel; let editors publish; let the devil do his worst. But see to it that nothing hinders you from fulfilling the work God has given you. He had not sent you to make money; He has not commanded you to get rich. He has never bidden you to defend your character nor has He bidden you to contradict falsehoods about yourself which Satan and his servants may start to peddle. If you do these things you will do nothing else; you will be at work for yourself and not for the Lord. Keep about your work. Let your aim be as steady as a star. Let the world brawl and bubble. You may be assaulted, wrangled, insulted, slandered, wounded, and rejected. You may be chased by foes, abused by them, forsaken by friend, despised and rejected of men, but see to it that with steadfast determination and with unflinching zeal you pursue that great purpose of your life and the object of your being until at last you can say; "I have finished the work which you, dear God, have given me to do?"

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