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Spiritual Balance

Legality vs License

Joel Portman

A perennial problem that causes difficulties among believers in Christ is that of maintaining a proper spiritual balance, or not veering to the right hand of extremism and the left hand of license. Humans tend to be creatures of extremes, either occupying one extreme or another, or moving from one side to the other, then finding fault with others who don't take the same position, move in the same direction or to the same degree. The history of the church has been fraught with different individuals or groups who, well-meaning, have advocated and demanded strict obedience to such religious laws that they believed, often in order to gain favor or acceptance with God, or to attain some higher spiritual level through rigid obedience. On the other extreme were those who maintained that the principles of grace and the distinction between the physical and spiritual permitted a radical degree of immorality and carelessness in living that didn't affect one's spiritual condition. Both of these extremes are condemned in God's holy Word.

It isn't difficult to identify three distinct forms of legalism. The first demands obedience to laws, some of them divine and some man-invented, as essential for man to gain salvation or acceptance with God. These are those who say (as in Acts 15:1), that "Unless you . . . you cannot be saved. . ." and there follow certain ceremonies, such as circumcision, baptism, rituals, and other requirements. The second form recognizes correctly that salvation is entirely by

grace and received by faith, but then teaches that the believer must rigidly obey certain laws and demands in order to maintain that salvation or to enjoy acceptance before God. The third form is possibly more prevalent, and this is usually seen among those who erect certain requirements that, in many cases, go beyond the simple, plain teaching of God's Word, and which are used to pass judgment on and criticize themselves and others when they don't adhere to them. Not satisfied with their personal convictions, they expect others to have the same.

Christ's Condemnation

During the days of our Lord upon earth, the legalistic viewpoint was primarily upheld by various sects of the Pharisees. God had given laws to Israel through Moses, and these laws were a part of the covenant relationship that Jehovah had established with them. Moses' law was for the blessing of the people, for their good, and it was their righteousness (Deuteronomy 6:25, 32:47). It set them apart from the surrounding nations, for the purpose of protecting and preserving them. However, with the passage of many years, that simplicity of the Mosaic law, as usual, developed into a system of intricate interpretations and applications, for instance, defining how one must wash the hands, how far one could travel on the Sabbath day, requirements for particular

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clothing, or other external practices. The Lord could say of them, that they presented an exterior of pretended spiritual superiority, but inwardly, their hearts were far from God. They became more concerned about what people did or how they appeared, than what they truly were before God. He berated them because they "tithed mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done and not to leave the other undone." (Luke 11:42). They were so meticulous to observe their particular manner of tithing to the smallest degree, but forgot the characteristics that the Lord desired above all, which was the condition of the heart inwardly that would result in proper actions outwardly.

Again in the same chapter, He accused them of making clean "the outside of the cup and of the dish, but your inside is full of ravening and wickedness." (v. 39). So careful were they in the outward appearance, fervently desiring that they might appear righteous in men's eyes, but ignoring how they appeared in God's eyes. They were those who "build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, if we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets." (Matthew 23:29-30), not realizing that they would be far guiltier, when they had "crucified the Lord of glory." (1 Corinthians 2:8). He accused them of rejecting the counsel of God against themselves (Luke 7:30) and instead acting like children in the markets who ignored the music played by friends, showing them that no matter what had been preached, either by John Baptist or by Himself, they refused to respond. How sad to be in that state! Under Divine condemnation, not that what they did in obedience to the law was wrong in itself, but "they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." (Matthew 23:4). Beware, lest any of us be like them!

He told the parables in Luke 15 and 18:8-14 to illustrate their sad state, for they were those who felt they were safe, in the fold of God's protection and blessing or in the

house, but they were like the 99 sheep, still in the wilderness and never being brought home as the lost one that was found. They were like the coin, in the house of Israel, but in the dark and beset by the dirty rags of Phariseism, or like the elder son, linked with the Father's house but never willing to go in to share a festive occasion of joy with his wayward, yet recovered, brother. They were those whom the Lord charges in John 9:40-41, for they saw intellectually, but were spiritually blind and didn't realize it.

We realize that these statements were made against those who multiplied laws and enforced them as being God's commandments to be obeyed. The Lord said of them, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," (Matthew 15:9). He constantly condemned them for their emphasis on outward observances without the correct condition of the heart. Paul also wrote against those who would mix the grace of God with any legal requirements of the law, whether it was circumcision or rituals connected with the Levitical economy.

Current Conditions

However, there are always well-meaning brethren who, though never teaching that legal requirements are essential for salvation, yet try to impose their own rules of outward appearance and actions upon others. Notice, it is their own rules, not what the Word of God clearly teaches. What is written is our responsibility to obey and practice, and that is not legalism. It may be taught legalistically by some, but if it is God's Word, it expresses His purpose and expectations of His people. Personal convictions may be correct and a believer may see certain aspects of life that bear upon his own life; however, it is necessary to realize that other saints may not have those particular views concerning those expectations, and it would be very difficult to substantiate them from the Word.

All Christians in an assembly need to be sensitive of the need for spiritual balance, involving the need to recognize the convictions of others and not insisting on acting independently. Fellowship and unity is important, and we learn in Romans 14 the

importance of seeking to do all possible to enhance that fellowship. That may mean curtailing one's own actions in view of not causing a rupture in the fellowship, nor causing another believer to stumble in his Christian life.

We all know of different religious groups that demand certain dress and regulate the personal life of all members stringently. We could mention those who demand that their members do not use electricity, don't drive machinery such as cars or tractors, forbid them from having any implement with rubber tires, and if they do have cars, all chrome must be painted black, as well as other standards. This is not to doubt the sincerity of those people, but it is to say that they impose rules on others that are not supported in any fashion by God's Word. Such requirements must be avoided.

The writer is not indicating that the pendulum should swing to the other extreme, as is sadly seen in many church groups today. Churches that used to expect that women come in dresses with sleeves and with covered heads, now accept them if they come, regardless of how much or little clothing they are wearing. We observe people going into churches for services in shorts, bathing suits, or any variety of attire. That is what many brethren are seeking to prevent. And with good reason. The dilemma is twofold: one is that expecting certain standards of dress can devolve into legalism. The other is that without any restraint, believers attending assembly gatherings become very casual in their appearance. So, what should guide believers in these matters for which there is not direct scriptural instruction?

Conscientious Conduct

First, should not our appearance in daily life, and even more so in assembly gatherings, distinctly indicate a sincere desire to honor the Lord and to represent Him before a world that cares not how one appears? We live daily before those who are not controlled by Divine principles, and how one conducts oneself is an indication of his or her recognition that "ye are not your own". God's Word in both Old and New Testaments shows us that in every sphere, God's people were to be characterized by a distinctness. "Peculiar people" doesn't mean

that we are to try to be odd or peculiar, in the sense that we usually think of it, but it signifies a people who are special to the Lord, having been purchased by a great price. It is never His intention that we should conduct ourselves, or try to conform to the world's standards, whatever they may be. An orderly arrangement indicates that such Divine control is recognized and expressed in one's life.

If this is true in our daily lives, so that we seek to dress modestly and with restraint, how much more when believers come together in assembly capacity, or at functions that are related to the assembly? The unsaved ones look on believers who come into the hall for meetings and what they see either indicates that there is no difference, or that there is some distinction. The natural tendency is to drift away from conscious subjection to an over-riding control, to do what seems best to us and more desirable in our own eyes. Remember that in the last chapters of Judges, the phrase, "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes," is repeated many times. That was the characteristic that caused such a severe rupture among the tribes of Israel. But are we becoming more and more like those who walk into churches appearing like they are not conscious of the importance of these things?

We do have a principle that God established for His people under the law. That was that when they came before God in worship, or also with regard to the priests who served in the holy things, God expected a certain standard that was representative of the holiness and reverence that belonged to that place. We can say that those of that day expressed that reverence in physical ways, but how do we express reverence and recognition for the reality of the divine presence when we come to an assembly meeting? Is it not true that if we devolve into casualness and appear at assembly meetings as we would go to any other event of the world, or in our daily activities, then we are not cognizant of a standard that should be upheld under those circumstances? Is there no distinction to our gathering together? Or is it no different from going to the supermarket or park?

One principle that should guide us is

that, in view of God's greatness, He should receive our best. Is He not worthy of some effort to respond to the blessed reality that we are in His presence, and it should cause us to rise to that standard? Is it too much trouble for a believer to take time to change into clothing that expresses the fact that we are going to an event that is different from other activities of our lives? It seems like some manifest the attitude that whatever is suitable for my day's work is suitable for going to an assembly gathering. One brother in whose house the writer was staying, came home from work in a clean pair of blue jeans and plaid shirt. We thought that he would change to something different after dinner, but no, he wore the same to the meeting. Why? However, in balance, we also remember days and conditions, also countries, where believers did not or do not have the ability to wear more "formal" attire. In early days of assembly work in Iowa, many farmers came to the meetings in their cleanest and best pair of overalls. It was their best that they could wear at that time, and later, they adjusted to something more suitable for the assembly.

Two dangers lurk in this problem of becoming casual in appearance. One is that our manner of dressing is also associated with our attitude, in that it either reflects what we think about the meetings, or it will also influence our thinking. In addition to that is that there is always a natural tendency to continue in a direction that one takes. We always need to ask ourselves, "What will be the next step?" in any action. Will brethren have to deal with believers who want to come in bermuda shorts and tank tops? Standards of appearance are always challenged by those who want to push the boundary, and without care and restraint, we may be seeing Christians coming to the meetings of the assembly as the folks do who walk through the doors of the world's churches.

The balance that believers must seek to maintain between legal demands and unrestrained permissiveness is always difficult, and we should seek to refrain from veering to the right hand or to the left. Without establishing rules for such things, may we be guided by the principles of the Holy Scriptures and a reverential recognition that we belong to

One, who deserves our utmost for His highest.

One is cognizant that whatever might be written on this subject, there will be those who will differ and not agree. We have attempted to strike a balance in writing about this difficult subject, realizing that there are likely those who will take an extreme position on both sides and insist that they are right. However, may the Spirit of God guide us to seek in all things to honor the Name of our Lord and to do His will.

The Religion of the Natural Man is made up of pride, ignorance, and a guilty conscience; these effectually keep the sinner far from God. Grace, on the contrary, moves us to draw near to God by the blood of Jesus. It was the obedience of faith that made Abel the acceptable worshiper.

Turning from God to Man

Robert Surgenor

In AD ?? when the gospel first entered Europe it was preached in the City of Philippi. The next city that heard was Thessalonica. The response was tremendous, and the Scriptures tell us that they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered them from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). An idol is anything that replaces God in the heart. America was founded on the principles of God. Today, America is turning from God to idols.

As we look back on the history of this great nation, we read of "the good old days" when the founders of this great nation feared God and manifested a reverence to divine things. Consequently, many of our laws legislated were take from the Holy Bible. There was a tendency toward uprightness and honesty. The Holy Bible was considered sacred,

was taught in our school system, and preached weekly to crowded congregations. Divorce was a rarity, children obeyed their parents, mothers were home-keepers, not office workers, and murderers were put to death for their crimes. Law enforcement officers were highly respected and obeyed. Dope was unheard of, and pornography was greatly suppressed. The moral state of the nation was much higher than today.

Education

In America, the first law to require education of the masses was passed by the Puritans. The law was called "The Old Deluder Satan Act." This name was a reference to the devil, who Christians believed got his foothold into people's lives because of their ignorance of Scripture.

For the first 200 years in America, children's reading texts emphasized biblical literacy. The emphasis on literacy was so intense in colonial America, that John Quincy Adams said in the early 1800's that the illiteracy rate was only 4/10 of 1 percent. It is estimated that in America today, 40 million people are functionally illiterate.

All but one of the first 123 colleges in colonial America were Christian institutions. While these universities have lost their Christian identities, it is interesting to read the founding statements of these schools. Harvard, for example, was founded on this statement: "Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life."

Noah Webster, educator and compiler of the 1828 "An American Dictionary of the English Language" wrote: "Education without the Bible is useless." Christian faith was integrated into every facet of education in early America.

Public schools today are basically liberal, humanistic, and antagonistic to Christian principles. Promiscuous behavior is encouraged, while Christian prayer and the bible are banned.

Compassion and Mercy

The ancient world left little trace of any organized charitable effort. However, due to Christianity, our Western culture places

emphasis on compassion, on helping the needy, and on alleviating distress, even in distant places. If there is a calamity in a foreign country most people in other cultures are unconcerned. Tell me, what foreign country helped America clean up and replace the twin towers in NYC? We have helped them in their crucial times, but they have never helped us. As the Chinese proverb has it, 'the tears of strangers are only water.' But here in the West we rush to help because mainly of our Christian background. The ancient Greeks and Romans did not believe this. They held a view quite commonly held in other cultures today: namely, "That's their problem, but not ours." Hospitals, orphanages, charitable organizations, and education for all, as we know them today, namely had their roots in Christianity.

Marriage and Family

The family, a devoted husband and wife raising their children in the fear of God, is a powerful ideal and asset in America's society. Its roots can be traced to Christian teaching. Before the Christian era, pederasty, and homosexuality, were not considered wrong. America is sadly slipping back to the non-Christian era. Over 52% of all marriages end in divorce and over 72% of all black children are born through unmarried mothers. Cohabitation, once condemned, is now looked upon as the norm. Christian based family life in America is mostly lying in shambles. The purity and beauty of a well composed lovable home is fading rapidly. We are becoming heathenish as a nation. Wickedness, lust, and lawlessness prevails.

Women

In non-Christian countries, women occupy a low status in society. The church forbade its members to treat them so. Greco-Roman society considered an unmarried woman of no value. Thus it was illegal for a widow to go more than two years without remarrying. However, Christianity was the first religion to not force widows to marry. They were supported financially and honored within the community so that they were not under great pressure to remarry if they didn't want to. Pagan widows lost all control of their husband's estate when

they remarried, but the church allowed widows to maintain their husband's estate. Christianity condemned cohabitation. No man had the right to live with woman outside of the marriage bond. Pagans allowed married men to have extramarital relations. Thus Christian women enjoyed far greater security and equality than did women in the surrounding culture.

Our Government

America's constitutional government has its roots in biblical doctrines. At least 50 of the 55 signers of the U.S. Constitution were professing Christians. The concept of our Constitutional checks and balances system is a direct result of the biblical doctrine of the sinfulness of mankind. All of our founders understood the importance of this doctrine to the social order. America's foundational idea of The Rule of Law rather than the authority of man traces back to the Old Testament, beginning with the Ten Commandments. Many aspects of our laws come directly from the Bible. The concept to our judicial, legislative and executive branches, and fair trials with witnesses can be traced to holy scripture. Regarding civil liberty, founding father John Adams (and others) emphasized the bible as the basis for American civil liberty. The slogan on the Liberty Bell is "Proclaim Liberty throughout the land unto all the Inhabitants Thereof" is from the bible in Leviticus 15:10.

Free Enterprise

Our founding fathers saw the concept of free enterprise in the bible, thus incorporated it into our system of government. What a contrast to communism, which is specifically an atheistic system that relies on the non-biblical notion that all men are good (thus will work for the common good). But communism has been an abject economic failure.

People fault capitalism. But, as put by D'Spouza, "The system of modern capitalism arose in the West. To some it is surprising that capitalism developed so easily in conjunction with a Christian ethic. But capitalism satisfied the Christian demand for an institution that channels selfish human desire toward the betterment of society. Some critics accuse capitalism of being a selfish system, but the

selfishness is not in capitalism—it is in human nature....While profit remains the final goal, entrepreneurs spend the better part of each day figuring out how better to serve the needs of their actual and potential customers. They are operationally, if not intentionally, altruistic....One may say that capitalism civilizes greed in much the same way that marriage civilizes lust."

Music

Had it not been for Christianity, music would likely sound very different from what we're used to. There may never have developed the cantata, the concerto, or the symphony. Handel, Vivaldi, and Bach were professing Christians who worked to honor God with their work. Bach, for example, signed all his works with "Soli Deo Gloria" ("Solely to the glory of God").

A renowned scholar on the literature of the Bible, Alistair McGrath notes, "Without the King James Bible, there would have been no Handel's "Messiah", no Negro spirituals, and no Gettysburg Address. The works of Handel, Beethoven, Mozart, and Mendelssohn among others have greatly been influenced by the words of the Bible; oftentimes the music itself directly reflected that influence. History books are filled with the rich details of men and women whose lives were changed by Jesus Christ and impacted the world for the better through ideas found in Scripture in a wide array of disciplines. To deny the influence of Christianity on Western Civilization is to deny history altogether.

As our nation slides down the slippery slope of liberalism, its music is degenerating from sweet sounds to the sour notes of the rap beat. As a style, rap music is dominated by rhythm and specifically the backbeat; harmony and melody take a back seat. The sound of the backbeat inherently signifies the motion of the body during the act of sexual intercourse, as any rock musician will readily attest. The relative durations of the spoken rhythms are highly syncopated against the pulse, suggesting agitation and in louder instances, anger. Phrase structures (in terms of the groupings of spoken rhythms) are frequently irregular as well, again suggesting instability

and a lack of respite. What harmony there is is extremely minimalistic and repetitive. Melody, for all intents and purposes, is non-existent. It may be claimed that the melody is single tone, but those tones are rarely sustained to the point of qualifying to be sung notes. It is rhymed, rhythmic speech, but not singing.

Rap music (a medium of communication) was birthed out of an ethos of violence, drugs, hatred, and sexuality, and naturally express those debased values. It is very noticeable, that when disturbed, debase people want to express rage, hatred, and violence, they are drawn to this form of music. America's once beautiful music is becoming more and more like voodooism.

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The perfection of our obedience in the sight of our heavenly Father lies not so much in attainment as in endeavor. Reserves spoil obedience. We may be dealing honestly with Sin that is seen outwardly, and yet not skilfully and effectually, because of not striking at the deep roots of evil within.

The Wonder of the Book, pt. 1

Dyson Hague, M.A.

(This was delivered as the address at the Annual Meeting of the Parkdale Bible Society, Toronto, on the evening of May 15th, 1912. It is published in the simple and conversational style in which it was delivered, at the earnest request of many who heard it.)

The wonder of the Book, my friends, grows on us as our experience is enlarged. For the more deeply we search it the more we feel that the Bible is not merely a book, but The Book. Sir Walter Scott in his dying hour was right when he asked his son-in-law to read to him out

of the Book, and in answer to the question, "What Book?" replied "There is only one Book, the Bible. In the whole world it is called 'The Book.' All other books are mere leaves, fragments." Yes. It alone is the perfect Book. It is the eternal Book. It is the Voice; all others are merely echoes. Of course, you all know that The Bible literally means The Book. It is a translation of the Greek title of the Bible, "He Biblos"; in English, The Book. It is the Book that stands alone; unapproachable in grandeur; solitary in splendor; mysterious in ascendancy; as high above all other books as heaven above earth, as the Son of God above the sons of men.

The Wonder of its Formation:

Now, one of the first things about this Book that evokes our wonder is the very fact of its existence. Anyone who has studied the history and origin of the Divine Word must be overwhelmed with wonderment at the mysterious method of its formation. That it ever was a book, and is today the Book of the modern world, is really a literary miracle. For there never was any order given to any man to plan the Bible, nor was there any concerted plan on the part of the men who wrote, to write the Bible. The way in which the Bible gradually through the centuries grew is one of the mysteries of time. Little by little, part by part, century after century, it came out in disconnected fragments and unrelated portions (Heb. 1:1), written by various men, without any intention, so far as we can tell, of anything like concerted arrangement. One man wrote one part in Syria, another man wrote another part in Arabia, a third man wrote in Italy or Greece; some writers wrote hundreds of years after or before the others, and the first part was written about fifteen hundred years before the man who wrote the last part was born. Now, take any other book you can think of on the spur of the moment, and think how it arose. You know fairly well how it arose. In nine cases out of ten a man determined to write a book, thought out the thoughts, collected the material, wrote it or dictated it, had it copied or printed, and it was completed within two or three or more months or years.

The average book, we may suppose,

takes from a year to ten years to produce, though a book like Gibbons' "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," or Tennyson's poems, took longer to complete. But, generally speaking, the average book you think of has been produced by one man within his own generation. Now, here is a book that took at least one thousand five hundred years to write, and spanned the span of sixty generations of this famous old world's history. It enlarges our conceptions of God; it gives us new ideas of His infinite patience, as we think of the wonder of His calm, quiet waiting as He watched the strain and the haste and the restlessness of man across the feverish years, as slowly and silently the Great Book grew.

Here a little and there a little of it came on; here a bit of history and there a bit of prophecy; here a poem and there a biography; here a letter, there a treatise; and at last in process of time, as silently as the house of the Lord of old (1 Kings 6:7), it came forth before a needy world in its finished completeness. When Moses died there were only five small portions; when David sat upon the throne there were a few parchments more; one by one princes and priests and prophets laid on the growing pile their greater and smaller contributions, until in process of time the whole of the Old Testament Bible was written in its entirety, word for word, letter for letter, sentence for sentence, book for book, precisely as we have it now, intact and complete; and, as Josephus testifies, no one through the ages has dared to add or take away, nor has the Old Testament text been altered in the slightest degree from that day to this.

But the New Testament is a far greater miracle from the literary standpoint than the Old Testament. The Jews, you all know, were not a writing people. I hardly know of a Jew who ever wrote a book, except Josephus, and I doubt very much if a man or woman here could mention two. Their training, as Bishop Westcott once said, was exclusively oral, and they had a disinclination for literary work. Not only so, but their Master was not a writer. Jesus never wrote a line for publication, so far as we know, and the idea of their writing an additional or supplementary Bible would never seem to have entered the mind of His disciples. They would

doubtless have sprung back with horror at the very idea of such a thing, and for fifty years after Jesus was born there was probably not a line of the New Testament written. But then, by the mystic suggestion and overruling design of the Almighty Spirit, without any concerted collaboration or unity of plan, fragment by fragment, here a little letter, there a biography, the New Testament grew. But remember; there was no pre-arrangement, no plan.

It was not as if Matthew and Mark and Luke and John came together in committee, and after solemn conference and seeking or the Leading of the Spirit, Matthew undertook to write of Christ as the King, and Mark said, "I would like for my part to write of Him as the Worker," and Luke said, "And I think I will undertake to delineate Him as the Man," and then John said, "Well, I will crown it by writing of Him as the Son of God!" It was not as if Paul met James one day, and after talking and praying about it, Paul agreed to write of the dogmatic, and James of the practical aspects of Christianity. Nothing of the sort. There is no trace of such a thing. They simply wrote as they were moved, to meet some passing need, to express some earnest longing, to teach some glorious truth, by a letter, or a treatise, or a memoir; and so this composite of fragmentary memoirs and disconnected letters came into this miraculous unit that we call the New Testament. Yes! The Book is marvelous; it is transcendental; it is altogether unexplainable. It is the miracle of literature in its formation.

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The Book of God is a store of manna for God's pilgrim children; and we ought to see to it that the soul get not sick and loathe the manna. The great cause of our neglecting the Scriptures is not want of time, but want of heart, some idol taking the place of Christ. Satan has been marvelously wise to entice away God's people from the Scriptures. A child of God who neglects the Scriptures cannot make it his business to please the Lord of glory: cannot make Him Lord of the conscience; ruler of the heart; the joy, portion, and treasure of the soul.

Man's Harmony or God's Unity

Samuel Keller

That the people of God should dwell together in unity is according to the mind of God: and a thing much desired by the spiritually minded among His people. That God's people are not all dwelling together in unity is too sadly evident, though the schemes devised and tried to bring about this happy condition have been many. For a time some of these schemes bid fair to accomplish the desired end, but eventually fail, though securing a state of harmony that for a little time has been mistaken for unity. True unity cannot be secured by devotion to a human leader though gifted and honorable, nor by subjecting ourselves to bonds of fellowship, or rules made and agreed to by common consent. Unity can only be had by complete subjection to God, that is, by unswerving obedience to His Word. We have HARMONY, and UNITY, both illustrated in the incident of the bringing up of the ark by King David, as given us in 2 Samuel 6:1, 1 Chronicles 13. where we have his ACTIONS told out; and in Psalms 131, 132, and 133, where we have his internal EXPERIENCES described.

The Ark was carried captive by the Philistines, in the last days of Eli, the priest, where it remained for seven months, after which it was returned by them, on a new cart, drawn by two kine which were at once offered up for a burnt offering, on a fire made of the wood of the new cart. The Ark was soon removed from this spot, to the house of Abinadab, where it remained for twenty years.

David's heart was stirred within him to bring up the Ark to the city of Jerusalem, where God had placed His name. In what appeared to be the largeness of his heart he consulted with the captains, and with all the leaders, and proposed to send abroad to their brethren; and with them the priests and Levites to gather themselves together to accomplish this great undertaking. All the congregation consented to do so, for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people. What an appearance of unity! There was not a dissenting voice.

Having gathered themselves together as one man, the Ark was now placed on a new cart, after the manner devised by the Philistines, and the journey began. The king and all Israel played before God with all their

might, and praised God with singing. What harmony! What zeal! What joy. And yet, united as they were, it was not God's unity, because it was contrary to the word of God. The Ark was His; the king was His; the priests and Levites were His; the leaders and the people were His, but His word was lacking, yea, disregarded. He had commanded that the Ark was to be carried on the shoulders of the Levites. Will God permit this disregard of His word to pass unnoticed, and allow human harmony to take the place of divine unity? He cannot. The oxen stumbled. The Ark shook. Uzza laid his hand upon the Ark to steady it. Death came to him; fear to the king; scattering to the people.

David's heart had been haughty; his eyes lofty; he had been filled with pride. He exercised himself in great matters; in things too high for him, (Psalm 131). He undertook to do the things of God in his own way setting aside the instructions God had given through Moses. His harmony was turned into confusion when God came upon it in judgment. Will David continue in his pride and self-will, brushing aside all who will not agree with his schemes, but who conform to the word of God? No. He knows God too well to follow such a course. Three months pass. He confesses that a serious mistake has been made; that they had not sought God after the due order. He behaves as a weaned child. His will is broken. He bows to the higher will, the will of God. They go again to bring the Ark up. Placing it upon the Levites' shoulders the procession starts for the city. Only six paces are taken when there is a halt made. Is it because of God's judgment upon them? No. God is helping them. They halt to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving to God. They then proceed on their way, and reach the city, with joy and gladness. All are rejoicing but one, Michal, the daughter of Saul who because of his self-will lost his crown and kingdom. He only carried out so much of the word of God as suited his cruel desires and purposes.

When the Ark is safely housed, and David sees how obedience to the word of God brings unity, with God's blessing upon the people he writes, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." God has been given His proper place; His word is bowed to and obeyed; the king, the Levites,

the people, all are in their God given place; and real blessing from God comes upon them in their true unity.

The actions and experiences thus recorded are given as a guide to us upon whom the end of the age has come. We shall find those who like David have led the people of God to victory in many a conflict against sin and Satan, now following a self-chosen course, trying to do the Lord's work according to their own thoughts, being satisfied with a human harmony of their own devising, and not the unity that is based upon obedience to the word of God: a unity where all speak the same thing,—that which God has spoken in His infallible word. When men preach harmony instead of God's unity their preaching is bound to sow discord, for the godly will not consent to bring up God's Ark upon a new cart of man's devising. They may speak of liberty, but liberty at the expense of truth leads into bondage by yoking with those who have departed from the word of God. Their charity is but license for those who are known to have departed in self-will from God's ways. Such will oppress and hinder the ministry of any who have the glory of God at heart, and who honor Him by refusing to follow those who refuse to follow Christ, who refuse to go on with those who refuse the whole counsel of God. "To the Law and to the Testimony, if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them."

"Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the Living God."

"Keep us, Lord, O keep us cleaving
To Thyself, and still believing
Till the hour of our receiving
Promised Joys in heaven."

Striving against sin is most painful at present, but indulgence in sin proves most bitter in the end. We cannot trifle with any sin without paying bitterly for it.

The Man of God

John Peters

(AT May/June 1980)

This majestic description occurs frequently in the Old Testament (e.g., Deut. 33, 11 ; I Samuel 9. 6-10), but only twice in the New Testament—1 Tim. 6, 11 and 2 Tim 3, 17. The man of God is :

1. Holy in His Walk

Firstly he is **humble**. As in all matters reflecting his daily walk his example is the Lord Jesus Christ, 'who humbled himself and became obedient unto death' (Philippians 2:8). He, the Son of God, left the ivory palaces, to step into a world of shame and woe to win man back to Himself. The humility of love led to exaltation and victory via the Cross. Humility is viewed in the New Testament as part of the 'life of faith : to be humble is simply to live in a way consistent with the profession of our lips (*Colossians 3:12; James 4:10; 1 Peter 3:6*, 'to be clothed with humility') The man of God in his reverent humility desires the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ; the attitude of John (he Baptist was "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Secondly he is **obedient to the Word of God**. We must not only be like Mary, who learned at the feet of the Lord (Luke 10:39), we must also 'search the scriptures' (John 5:39) and allow them to rule our conduct. Obedience to the Word of God has a prominent part in the New Testament (John 14:23; Titus 1:9; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; compare Psalm 119:105); ultimately our obedience in this respect is the expression of our love for the Lord. Notice how the Lord used the sacred scriptures to counteract the subtlety of the Devil in (he wilderness (Matthew 4) when tempted to self-satisfaction (v. 3), self-destruction (v. 7) and self-glorification (v. 9) He prefaced His reply on each occasion with the ringing affirmation, 'It is written.' And of course obedience to the Word of God leads to conformity to the Will of God. The principle of obedience led our Lord to the Cross of Calvary, Peter to martyrdom and death, and Paul to much suffering.

Thirdly the man of God **loves**. This is the import of (he teaching of John's 1st Epistle, a

work written to encourage the beleaguered believers of Asia Minor. Loving the brethren, claims the Apostle John, is one of the proofs that we have eternal life. A contemporary historian recorded that the early Christians loved each other with deep sincerity and intensity. Peter's injunction is as relevant today as it was when first he wrote it: 'love one another with a pure heart fervently' (1 Peter 1:22).

Fourthly the man of God is **wholly yielded unto God**, Romans 6:13.

2. Equipped for the Work of God

There is an excellent illustration of (his in 2 Kings 4. The Shunammite woman prepared for Elisha a room containing a bed, a table, a stool and a candlestick. The bed would speak to us of rest in Christ (Matthew 11:28-30). The man of God has rest from a condemning conscience because he has been justified by faith; from dependence on his own ability and fitness for service. The table would speak to us of communion with Christ (Revelation 3:20) Norman Grubb in his biography of C. T. Studd relates how the intrepid missionary would rise about 2.30 am each day and, after a cup of tea, he would take down the Bible and be alone with God: 'what passed between them in those silent hours was known a few hours later to all who had ears to hear.' The candlestick would speak of witnessing to Christ, and the stool of learning from Christ (see Philippians 2:14-16 and 2 Corinthians 10:5).

3. Powerful in His Witness

Again what an inspiring example we see in the life of Elisha, 2 Kings 4:18-37. The child was dead, as indeed we all are spiritually until we are quickened (made alive) by the Lord Jesus Christ. Gehaz was unable to do any thing for the child, and not surprisingly, because he went to his task without prayer or preparation; nor was he persistent or believing in his attitude. Elisha began with prayer and trusted to God to give the dead child new life. He showed great exercise of heart and perseverance in his dealings with the child and the result was that the Shunammite woman's son "opened his eyes." It is ever the task and privilege of the man of God to lead the unconverted to a

position where the eyes of their understanding are opened to perceive the truth of God; and then to instruct the converts in such a way that they progress, with enlightened understanding to a position of maturity in the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:28). May we all endeavor to be more like the men and women of God as they are described in the Word of God.

"Powerlessness"

W. R. Newell,

"Romans, Verse by Verse"

But we are pleading for the self-judgment and abasement before God that recognizes our real state. The outward church today is Laodicean, "wretched, poor, miserable, blind, naked"--and knows it not! And the Philadelphian remnant have only "a little strength." Let us be honest! We have substituted for the mighty operations amongst us of the Holy Ghost, the pitiful "soulical" training of men. We look to men to train, to "prepare" preachers, and teachers, and "leaders," for a heavenly company, the Church, among whom the Holy Ghost Himself dwells as Administrator. Let us not dare to claim that the Holy Ghost is no longer willing to work in power amongst us. Because, for Him to do so is God's plan! Indeed, He is so working where not hindered. Let us confess the truth. Our powerlessness is because of unbelief,--the inheritance of the sins of our fathers, the inheritance of a grieved Spirit. It may be true that He does not work as He once did; but let us admit two things: we dare not say, He is not willing so to work; and, we dare not say it is God's plan that He does not! We can only say, We have sinned! So did Daniel (Daniel 9). So did Ezra (Ezra 9). So did they of Nehemiah's day (Nehemiah 9). Our days are days of failure, just like those. Nor will it do, (as with so many enlightened saints), merely to "see and judge the failure of the professed Church" and gather in the name of the Lord, and remember His death in the breaking of bread every Lord's day. All this is good. But we must judge ourselves if we do not have real power amongst us. And the power of the Spirit, in a day of apostasy like this, will bring us into a deep burden over the state of things, and into prayer, such as the great men of God made in the three great chapters to which we have just referred!