

Barnabas:
The Disciple Who Was
Nicknamed Encouragement



Hosted by the Southaven Church of Christ
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Dedication

In years past, we have dedicated our lectureship books to those who are well-known across our brotherhood—B. J. & Tish Clarke, Garland & Corinne Elkins, Keith & Dorothy Mosher, Robert & Irene Taylor, Jr., and Curtis & Annette Cates. This year, we are dedicating the book to a couple that is not as well-known across our brotherhood as the ones mentioned above, but is every bit as deserving of honor.

It seems especially fitting that we are studying the life of Barnabas, the great encourager, this year. As you know, he was not as well-known as Peter and Paul. However, the contributions that he made to the cause of Christ cannot be denied. Just think about the difference that Barnabas made to the congregations that met in Jerusalem and Antioch. Just think of the encouragement that the Christians who worked and worshipped there received from him. It is not hard for us at Southaven to wrap our minds around this thought. After all, for as many years as most of us can remember, we have had our own difference-makers and encouragers. Only God knows the full effect that this man and his wife have had upon this congregation. However, we can say without reservation, or fear of rebuttal, that it has been significant. It is, therefore, with great gladness, that we dedicate this year's book to Horace and Billie Coleman.

Until just recently, Horace, with Billie's help, coordinated our Faith In Action visitation program. As the name suggests, this program is designed to put our faith as Christians into action. As you know, true faith is active and not passive. It is works and not just words. James wrote, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have

works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (Jam. 2:14-18). FIA (Faith In Action) was not only designed to help us to put our faith in action, it was designed to help us to identify those who are MIA (Missing In Action). Each week, Horace and Billie carefully checked attendance rolls to see who was missing in action. If someone was missing, then they assigned a visit to them. In the Lord’s army, like the U.S. Army, the policy is “no man left behind.” Horace and Billie, better than anyone else, knew that there were multiple reasons why members were missing in action (MIA). Some were missing because of physical sickness. Others were missing because they had been wounded—some by enemy fire and some by friendly fire. Still others were simply AWOL. They knew that each situation required a unique approach. Some visits required tough love, while others required tender loving care.

In addition to working with Faith In Action, Horace and Billy worked with the We Care group. As most of you know, the We Care group is a group of senior saints who get together and do things. Eating and playing games are their favorite things to do. Did I mention that they like to eat? Although they like to play a wide variety of games, dominoes and Rook are probably their favorites. Believe me when I say that they are serious about these games. I have seen them stay up till midnight playing these games. I actually went to bed before they did. They are pretty good at the games, too. Just take Horace, for example. Just the other day, someone was telling me how good he is at Rook. One night, he even “shot the moon.” In case you are not familiar with Rook, let me explain what it means to “shoot the moon.” To “shoot the moon” is the highest bid that a person can make. When you “shoot the moon,” you must take every point in the game, generally 180 points. If you give up even five points, you will go set and lose the total point value of all of the cards. However, if you successfully “shoot the moon,” you will earn 500 points and depending upon the score that you are playing to, win the game. On the night under discussion (the night that Horace “shot the moon”), I understand that he was dealt the perfect hand. As the story goes, Horace’s cards had been horrible all night. However, things changed drastically for the better when Horace left the room to go and tell

someone goodbye. While he was gone, those who were playing with him conspired to play a trick on him. They built him the perfect hand. When Horace returned to the table and picked up his cards, he could not believe his eyes. He had the Rook and all the trump cards that he could ever need. When it was time for him to bid, Horace announced, “I shoot the moon.” When the laughter started, Horace knew that he had been set up.

As many of you know, Horace retired from the Kellogg Cereal Company. Contrary to rumors, Horace didn't start the company. However, he was there when it started in 1906. I'm just kidding! He missed the start by a year or two. Although Horace didn't start the company, it is rumored that he is the inspiration for one of the Kellogg characters. Who would your guess be? Toucan Sam from Fruit Loops? Dig 'Em Frog from Sugar Smacks? Snap, Crackle, or Pop from Rice Krispies? Personally, I don't think that it is any of these characters. However, now that he is older, and has arthritis, it could be Snap, Crackle, and Pop. I have it narrowed down to two other characters: Cornelius the rooster from Corn Flakes or Tony the Tiger from Frosted Flakes. At first, I was leaning toward Cornelius the rooster. If you have ever purchased a box of Corn Flakes, and who hasn't, then you have seen Cornelius or “Corny” the rooster. He appears on every box of Corn Flakes. What would you say if I told you that Horace's nickname is “Rooster?” I promise I am not making this up. Some folks still call him this. I'm sure that after this book comes out, even more will do so. Horace claims that he got his nickname from his brother Robert. As the story goes, Robert gave Horace this name because he reminded Robert of a Bantam or “Banty Rooster.” As you may know, if you grew up on a farm, “Banty Roosters” are small, but spirited. They are known for their aggressive, “puffed-up” attitudes. I guess this could be true. I can kind of see Horace as a rooster. Of course, “Rooster” could also just be a codename from Kellogg. Lately, I have been leaning more toward Tony the Tiger. Tony has that deep voice. Now, you may be thinking, “Horace doesn't have a deep voice?” You see, that is the beauty of it. It is all a cover. You should hear Horace at home when he is singing in his shower. He sounds like that guy from the Oak

Ridge Boys that used to sing *Elvira*. You think I am kidding, but I am as serious as I can be. Another thing that makes me think Tony the Tiger is the fact that Tony is so athletic and strong. I know what you are thinking. You are thinking, “But Horace isn’t athletic or strong.” See, there you go again. You are doing just what they want you to do. You are buying the disguise. Horace is really very buff. Again, he just hides it well. The thing that really put me over the top with Horace being the inspiration for Tony the Tiger is that fact that Tony is such an encourager. Tony is always telling people that they can do something. He is always telling people that they are great. I realize that the deep voice and the athleticism might be a tiny stretch, but you will have to agree that this last characteristic is right on target. Horace is an encourager.

I know what you are thinking. “But what about Mrs. Billie?” Well, in the 1970’s Kellogg briefly introduced Tony’s wife—Mrs. Tony. I guess we will just have to start calling Billie, Mrs. Tony. Maybe, we can just shorten it to Mrs. T. Whatever you call the two of them—Horace and Billie, Tony & Mrs. Tony, or even Mr. T. and Mrs. T., I believe that you will agree, **They’re Grrrrreat!**

Acknowledgments

½ Water & ½ Air—Technically, the glass is always full.

At least, I know that my glass is. Actually, to be completely accurate, my glass isn't just full; it is running over (Psa. 23:5)! God has been so good to me. Each year, He gives me some wonderful people to work with in producing this book.

It is hard to believe that this is the sixth book that we have produced: David, Peter, Moses, The Prodigal Son, Job, and now, Barnabas. Some of the people who helped me this year have been with me from the beginning. I am thankful that they still believe in what we are trying to do. Most of all, I am thankful that they are still willing to help us to get it done. I'm sure that over the years I have asked more of them than was humanly possible.

Each year individuals have jumped on the bookmobile as we have sped along. Of course, a few have also jumped off. Despite what they say, they were not pushed. They just chose to get eight hours of sleep a night, something that the rest of us have learned to live without. The ones that have joined the team along the way remind me of a sign that I saw one time in Texas. It read: "I wasn't born in Texas, but I got here as fast as I could." Although the books might have been better had these newbies gotten here sooner, we are glad that they got here when they could.

First, I would like to thank the Southaven elders—Larry Everson, Con Lambert, and Vern Schrimsher—for allocating the funds to produce this book. As you may know, it is not cheap to produce lectureship books. Plus, it is a long-term investment. The money that is put into the books is not recouped until the books are sold years down the road. A back room full of books is evidence of the long-term commitment that our elders have made to producing sound materials for our brotherhood. It is awesome to think that someone who isn't even born yet may one day find one of these books in a church library and profit from it. Who knows, we might

still have one in our back room for sale. Just kidding! They are going to fly off of the shelves like hotcakes.

Second, I would like to thank April Meacham. It is a joy to work with April each year. I am so glad that I dragged her kicking and screaming onto the bookmobile many years ago. Actually, the kicking and screaming was what I did before she got on board. Believe it or not, she volunteered for this assignment. Of course, when she volunteered, she didn't know that she was going to be given three consecutive life sentences with no chance of parole. What can I say? She should have read the small print. In all seriousness, I would like to thank April for sharing the stress of producing a book. I would like to thank her for patiently waiting for manuscripts, mine included. I would like to thank her for fixing twelve plus years of not listening like I should have in grammar class. I would like to thank her for loving grammar so that the rest of us don't have to. I would like to thank her for staying up late and getting up early to proofread and perfect manuscripts. I know that there just has to be a special place in heaven for those like her who to edit lectureship books.

Third, I would like to thank the secretaries at Southaven—Shelley McGregory, Diane Mansel, and Laurie White. Shelley and Diane are still on the bus (bookmobile), but Laurie fell off at some point last year. I promise that we didn't push her. However, we did laugh when she hit the ground. What are friends for! Hopefully, Shelley and Diane won't follow suit. However, I wouldn't blame them if they did. After all, being a secretary is a very hard job. I appreciate all that they do for me during lectureship season and around the year.

Fourth, I would like to thank Paul Sain and the staff at Sain Publications. The East Hill congregation in Pulaski, TN is blessed to have Paul as her preacher, lectureships are blessed to have him as their printer, and I am blessed to have him as my friend. Thanks, Paul, for producing quality books quickly.

Fifth, I would like to thank Bill Pierce for all of the things that he has done over the years to help with the book and the lectureship. I assure you that we did not push him off the bus. In fact, we have half a mind to drive to Nashville and get him. Bill, we love you and we miss you.

Sixth, I would like to thank those who write the chapters that fill this book. They truly are some of the best, brightest, and busiest men in our brotherhood. They might also be some of the slowest. Do you know what a manuscript deadline means to a preacher? It means that it is almost time to begin writing.

Although my name appears on the front of the book, I want you to understand that the book is the result of the tireless efforts of the brothers and sisters that I have mentioned above. I am so thankful that God allows me to work with them.

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CHAPTER 1

Barnabas: The Disciple Who Was Nicknamed Encouragement

Wade Webster

The name *Barnabas* appears twenty-eight times in the King James Version of the Bible. It occurs twenty-three times in the book of Acts alone. There are only three names that occur more in the book of Acts than the name Barnabas—Paul (129 times), Peter (56 times), and John (24 times). Clearly, in the words of David Roper, Barnabas is a “major minor character” (169). Although he did not possess the greatness of Peter or the genius of Paul, he played a major role in the early history of the church. As you know, the first half of the book of Acts (Acts 1-12) deals primarily with the work of Peter, and the second half of the book (Acts 13-28) deals primarily with the work of Paul. Barnabas’ life and work intersected and impacted both of them.

Barnabas’ given name was Joses (Acts 4:36). However, he is only once referred to by that name in Scripture. Joses is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joseph, which means “exalted” (Thayer and Smith, “Ioses”). No doubt, you recall that Joseph was exalted by his father Jacob. He was given a coat of many colors to separate him from his

brothers because he was the firstborn son of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel. Despite the fact that Joseph was preferred and pampered by his father, he grew up to be a great young man. It is easy to see why Barnabas' parents would give their son this name. It is interesting to note that Joses, whose name meant exalted, grew up to exalt or to build up others. Because of the encouragement that Joses gave in word and in work, the apostles surnamed or nicknamed him Barnabas. *Bar*, the first part of the name, means "son of." It is a Hebrew expression that means "partaking of the nature of" (Roper 169). Johnny Stringer noted that "One who possessed a particular quality was often called the son or child of that quality. For example, a disobedient person was called a child of disobedience (Eph. 2:2)" (87). *Nabas*, the second half of the name, means "consolation" (Zodhiates) or "rest" (Thayer and Smith, "Barnabas"). Some people bring trouble and strife by their presence, but Barnabas brought comfort and rest. Roper noted a related word "is used to describe both the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) and Christ (1 John 2:1)" (170). Barnabas served as a comforter for the church and as an advocate for Paul and John Mark. He stood beside Paul and John Mark and defended them when others wanted nothing to do with them.

Clovis Chappell contrasted James and John with Barnabas. He wrote, "James and John were called the sons of thunder. That speaks of power, might, dash, the lightning's flash, the thunder's crash. There is a storm in their personalities. But Barnabas is the peaceful sunset after the storm. He is the light at eventide. He is a son of consolation" (89). Have you ever thought about the fact that Barnabas was so encouraging that his nickname replaced his given name? Because he exalted others instead of himself, his name was changed from Joseph to Barnabas. Today, we

cannot even think about Biblical encouragement without thinking of him. How neat is that! Would it not be great if the same were true of us? Chappell went on to describe Barnabas as “incarnated encouragement, embodied comfort, flesh and blood consolation” (89). In other words, if encouragement was a skeleton and you fleshed it out, you would have Barnabas.

By his spirit, Barnabas showed himself to be a son of God. After all, God is described in Scripture as “the God of patience and consolation” (Rom. 15:5). It is interesting to note that in this passage just referenced (Rom. 15:5), Paul instructed the saints at Rome “to be likeminded one toward another.” The saints at Rome were to have the mind of God toward one another. They were to be patient and encouraging with each other. Even before Paul penned these instructions by inspiration, Barnabas was practicing them. He was comforting others with the comfort that he himself had received from God (2 Cor. 1:3-4). Someone has described attitude as “a little thing that makes a big difference.” For sure, this was the case with Barnabas. He made a big difference in the early church by his encouraging attitude and actions. Someone has noted, “A word of encouragement from a parent can shape a child’s life. A word of encouragement from a spouse can salvage a marriage. A word of encouragement from a brother in Christ can save a soul” (Maxwell 9). I am convinced that Barnabas saved many souls, aren’t you?

George Matthew Adams described encouragement as “oxygen to the soul” (qtd. in Maxell 8). As you know, without oxygen, a person will die. In like manner, without encouragement, people die. Encouragement is to the soul what oxygen is to the lungs. Having been in the room on several occasions when people died, I can tell you that there are few sights and sounds as pitiful as a person gasping for

air. In congregational work, there have been many times down through the years when I have seen people struggling to breathe. I have even seen elders, preachers, and deacons dying from lack of encouragement. Even great men need encouragement. An exhibit at the Smithsonian displays the personal effects found in the pockets of Abraham Lincoln on the night that he was shot. There was a small handkerchief embroidered *A. Lincoln*, a penknife of a country boy, a spectacle case with cotton string, a Confederate five dollar bill and a worn-out newspaper clipping praising his accomplishments as president. The clipping starts out, “Abe Lincoln is one of the greatest statesmen of all time...” (Maxwell 59). As you may know, Lincoln’s critics were attacking him mercilessly in the papers. The weight of the war and the world was on his shoulders. This little clipping shows just how desperate Lincoln was for encouragement. The reporter who penned these lines encouraged a president and impacted a nation. Likely, he never knew how much his words meant. Mark Twain once noted, “One compliment can keep me going for a whole month” (qtd. in Maxwell 9). We should never underestimate the power of our words (Pro. 18:21).

Long before Lincoln and the press clipping in his pocket, there was another very important man who needed encouragement. That man was Paul. Following his conversion, Paul sought “to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26). Imagine how discouraging this must have been to this new convert. He must have been gasping for the oxygen of encouragement. Thankfully, Barnabas was there to breathe new life into Paul. You may recall that Barnabas did a similar thing with a young man named John Mark. For some reason, Mark turned back on the first missionary journey that he took with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:5; Acts 15:39). Not only

did he disappoint them, he disappointed himself. Aubrey Johnson noted, “Every disciple encounters his own Perga at some point. Christianity is joyous, but also rigorous, and there is a moment in every saint’s life, when he asks, ‘Is it really worth it?’” (126). When Paul expressed his desire to take a second trip, Barnabas expressed his desire to take John Mark with them again. No doubt, Barnabas wanted to give John Mark a second chance. He wanted to give the young man an opportunity to redeem himself. Clovis Chappell wrote, “But Barnabas—somehow he cannot bring himself to give him up. He believes that even if a man failed once he may succeed at a second trial. He believes that a coward may become a hero, that a deserter may yet become a trusted and faithful soldier” (87-88). Paul was not convinced. He did not think that it was “good” to take Mark with them (Acts 15:38). I do not know if John Mark knew about Paul’s doubts of him or not. I hope not. I hope that it was a private conversation between Paul and Barnabas. If Mark did know, then it must have been very discouraging to him. Thankfully, Barnabas, the great encourager, was there to breathe new life into him. Barnabas’ actions would make a difference in the young man’s life. In fact, Paul would acknowledge as much. He would say that Mark was “**profitable**” to **him** for the **ministry** (2 Tim. 4:11). *Profitable* means “*easy to make use of*” (Thayer, “Eúchreestos”) or “very useful” (Zodhiates, “Eúchreestos”). This young man that Paul had seemingly no use for earlier was now useful to him in many ways. Mark failed as Paul’s minister or servant earlier (Acts 13:5; Acts 13:13), but now he was useful to Paul in the “ministry.” Like Onesimus, John Mark was a changed man and Paul was humble enough and honest enough to acknowledge as much (Phil. 11).

For many years, Barnabas has been one of my favorite Bible characters. What a delight it is to study his life in

detail. I have often said in my teaching and preaching that if I could have only one person with which to begin a congregation, I would select someone like Barnabas. After all, everyone needs encouragement. Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-Fil-A once asked, “How do you identify someone who needs encouragement?” He answered, “That person is breathing” (Maxwell 46). If a person is breathing, they need encouragement. Encouragement keeps shepherds shepherding, preachers preaching, deacons serving, members working, visitors visiting, God smiling, and the devil fuming. If I could only be like one person in the Bible, I think that I would pick Barnabas. What greater compliment can be given anyone than the words, “You encouraged me.” I hope that over the course of this study, and the other studies that fill this book, that you will come to love and appreciate the man as I do.

Helpful

By definition, to encourage is “1. to give courage, hope, or confidence to; embolden; hearten; 2. to give support to; be favorable to; foster, help” (“Encourage”). The actions of Barnabas clearly fit this definition. The first time that we read about Barnabas in the Scriptures, he was selling land to help or encourage those in need. Luke records, “And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:36-37). The fact that Barnabas had land likely reveals that he was *wealthy*. The fact that Barnabas sold the land to help the poor shows that he was *healthy*. Barnabas was not suffering from the common problem of “affluenza.” Money was not his god (Mat. 6:24). Someone has noted, “If you have anything you cannot live

without, give it away.” After all, anything that is too valuable to give away probably has too much of a hold on your heart (Power 79). Barnabas, like the other early Christians, did not consider the things that he possessed as “his own” (Acts 4:32; cf. 1 Chr. 29:14-16). Barnabas understood that everything that he had belonged to God. He knew that the earth was the Lord’s and the fulness thereof (1 Cor. 10:26). He knew that he was just a steward. Realizing that he would one day have to give an answer for his stewardship, Barnabas put to use that which God had given to him (Mat. 25:14-30). He wanted to hear the words one day, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” Clovis Chappell noted, “Barnabas got a degree in goodness, and the first course he mastered was a course in Christian Stewardship” (86).

It should be noted that from the beginning the saints sold land and other possessions to help one another (Acts 2:44-46). While it is true that this action did not begin with Barnabas, it is also true that it did not end with him. What is a good sermon without a reference to a country song? Perhaps you have heard the song *Chain of Love* sung by country recording artist Clay Walker. In the song, a rich lady has a flat tire and a poor man named Joe stops and changes the tire for her. The rich lady offers to pay Joe for changing her tire, and Joe responds, “You don’t owe me a thing, I’ve been there too. Someone once helped me out, just the way I’m helping you. If you really want to pay me back, here’s what you do — don’t let the chain of love end with you” (“Clay Walker”). Whether or not you like the song, the theology is sound. You are not to let the chain of love end with you. Barnabas did not. I have a feeling he would have liked the song. Although Barnabas did not let the chain of love end with him, someone did. Eventually, Christians quit selling property to help one another. These Christians were truly amazing. David Roper

noted that, “After a child is born, one of the first words he learns is ‘mine.’” However, “after these were born again, one of the first words they forgot was ‘mine’” (167).

If Barnabas was not the only one who sold land to meet the needs of poor brethren, and he was not, then why is he the only one mentioned by name? Some suggest it was because his sacrifice was greater than that made by others. Perhaps, like the poor widow, he cast in all his living (Mark 12:44). Others suggest that Luke mentioned Barnabas by name to introduce a man who would figure prominently in the history of the early church, including the work of Peter and Paul. Finally, still others suggest that Barnabas was named to contrast his honest and unselfish behavior with the dishonest and selfish behavior of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). Whether this was Luke’s intention or not, it clearly sets up quite a contrast. As you recall, Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession and lied about how much they were giving. They wanted Barnabas’ praise without making Barnabas’ sacrifice.

When Barnabas saw the needs of his new brothers and sisters in Christ, his heart was moved with compassion. He knew that if he had this world’s goods, and he did, he could not shut up his bowels of compassion and continue to be like God. John wrote, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:16-17). After all, God saw man’s need and helped. Barnabas knew that he must do the same thing. Barnabas did not just love in word or in tongue. He loved in deed and in truth. He proved the sincerity of his love by what he gave (2 Cor. 8:8). His faith was coupled with works. Barnabas did not just say to a brother or sister who was

naked or hungry, “Be ye warmed and filled” (Jam. 2:15-16). He provided them with the food and the clothing that they needed to be warm and full (Luke 10:30-37). Words alone would not have been very encouraging. In fact, it would have been discouraging to have been a part of a family that did not help in time of need.

It should be noted that the situation presented in the early chapters of the book of Acts, especially in the 2nd and 4th chapters, was unique. A tremendous number of Jews travelled to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. They brought ample supplies or cash to meet their needs for the time that they expected to be in Jerusalem. However, while they were there, they heard the gospel and were converted. As new Christians, they were not ready to go home and be all alone. Therefore, they stayed in Jerusalem, and their funds were exhausted. They could not go to the ATM as we can or put expenses on a charge card until next month. Soon, they were out of funds, and in need. H. Leo Boles noted that it was easy to see how some of them would have had legitimate needs, “not because they had been idle, neither because they had squandered their possessions, nor yet because they were shiftless; but their means had been exhausted and now they were in need” (76). Out of the goodness of their hearts, Christians like Barnabas sold possessions to provide for those in need.

Hospitable

To be hospitable is to be “given to generous and cordial reception of guests.” It is to be “readily receptive” and “open” (“Hospitable”). Barnabas certainly matches this definition. He was “given to hospitality” (Rom. 12:13; cf. 1 Pet. 4:9). As we have already discussed in this lesson, when Saul sought to join himself to the disciples in Jerusalem, they were all

afraid of him and doubted his conversion (Acts 9:26). I know that where they met was likely different than where we meet, but imagine a scene with me. The brethren are standing in the foyer talking to each other. When Saul walks in, the conversation stops, and every eye focuses on him. Women pull their children to their sides and shuttle quickly out of the room. Saul goes on in and finds a seat. No one comes and sits by him. In fact, a few get up and move further away. I cannot say for sure that this is exactly what happened, but I believe that it matches the general description given by Luke. Even though Saul was a grown man, it must have hurt. No doubt, he tried to rationalize their cold and cautious reception in his mind. He was fully aware of the past hurt that he had brought these families, or at least families just like them (Acts 8:3-4). In his mind, he may have put himself in their shoes and thought about how he would have reacted if the roles were reversed. Still, it hurt. As you know, before coming to Jerusalem, he had been in Damascus. The brethren there had evidently received him warmly. He abode there many days with them and preached courageously and convincingly in the synagogues (Acts 9:19-23). It seems that they had grown to accept and love him. When some Jews plotted to kill him, they helped him to escape (Acts 9:23-25). No doubt, they put themselves in danger by doing so. The warm reception of the brethren in Damascus, followed by the cold reception of the brethren in Jerusalem would have been a shock to anyone's system. When Barnabas saw what was happening, he took action immediately. Someone has said that "encouragement is deciding to make your problem my problem." This is exactly what Barnabas did. Barnabas made Saul's problem, his problem. He did for Saul what he would have wanted Saul to do for him had the roles been reversed (Mt. 7:12). Barnabas made Saul feel at home. The

following lines by Thomas Bailey Aldrich sum up what true hospitality is:

When friends are at your hearthside met,
Sweet courtesy has done its most
If you have made each guest forget
That he himself is not the host.

Luke records, “But **Barnabas** took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:27). Please notice the first word of this passage—but. As you know, the conjunction *but* is a word of contrast. The brethren gave Saul the cold shoulder, *but* Barnabas gave him a warm embrace. The brethren watched Saul suspiciously, *but* Barnabas welcomed him sincerely. The brethren doubted Saul, *but* Barnabas believed in him. The brethren remembered, and perhaps recited, Paul’s past persecution of Christ, *but* Barnabas spoke of Paul’s recent preaching of Christ. Clovis Chappell noted that Barnabas was generous with his possessions (Acts 4:36-37) and with his judgments (Acts 9:27). He also noted that “Barnabas was proficient in that difficult branch that we call faith. He had acquired faith till he was full of it. Faith in God? Yes, he had faith in God. That lies back of all that he did and all that he became. But the faith that shows itself most in his life, as we see it, is his faith in men. How he did believe in folks! Confidence in men is an essential to true goodness. I do not believe that any cynic was ever a really good man” (91, 86).

Because of Barnabas’ actions, the brethren eventually warmed up to Saul. In fact, he was with the apostles, in coming in and going out in Jerusalem. When a new plot arose against

him, the brethren in Jerusalem did what their counterparts in Damascus had done. They helped Saul get out of town. No doubt, by this time, they wanted him to stay. They had come to love and accept him. Barnabas' initial hospitality to Saul had finally opened the hearts of the brethren.

Honorable

Among other things, the term *honorable* attests to “credible conduct.” It is “consistent with an untarnished reputation.” It is “characterized by integrity” and “guided by a high sense of honor and duty” (“Honorable”). If you are familiar with the eleventh chapter of Acts, then you know that I just described Barnabas. Luke records, “For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord” (Acts 11:24). Good is from the Greek word *agathos* which means “upright, honorable” (Thayer). The root word means “good and benevolent, profitable, useful” (Zodhaites, “Agathos”). Concerning the word *good*, Clovis Chappell noted:

‘He was a good man.’ We do not thrill when we hear that. It is not a word that quickens our pulse beat. We do not sit up and lean forward. We rather relax and stifle a yawn and look at our watches and wonder how soon it will be over. We are interested in clever men, in men of genius. We are interested in bad men, in courageous men, in poor men and rich men, but good men—our interest lags here, nods, drowns, goes to sleep.

The truth of the matter is that the word ‘good’ is a bit like the poor fellow

that went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. It has fallen among thieves that have stripped it of its raiment and have wounded it and departed, leaving it half dead. It is a word that has a hospital odor about it. It savors of plasters and poultices and invalid chairs. Its right hand has no cunning. Its tongue has no fire. Its cheeks are corpse-like in their paleness. It seems to be in the last stages of consumption.

If people say we are handsome or cultured we are delighted, but who is complimented by being called good? (81)

But let me remind you that, in spite of popular misconception, 'good' is not after all a weak word. It is a strong, brawny, masculine word. It has the shoulders of a Samson. It has the lifting power of a Hercules. And the reason God employed it here to describe this man Barnabas was not because He had to say something about him and could not find anything else decent to say. It was not a word to cover up the deformity of uselessness or the glaring defect of a moral minus sign. He used the word because there was none other that would fitly describe the fine and heroic man of whom He was speaking. It means here all that 'Christian' means. (83)

Because he was good, Barnabas was honorable. Marcus T. Cicero noted, “Honor is the reward of virtue.” Because he was honorable, Barnabas was useful. The church in Jerusalem often sent him out on important business. Luke records, “Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth **Barnabas**, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:22-23). The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to investigate the reports of multiple conversions among the Grecians in Antioch. Some commentators believe that the leadership in Jerusalem was a little nervous about the new movement in Antioch and wanted to keep an eye on it (cf. Acts 11:2). Others believe that they were thrilled with the reports and sent Barnabas to encourage them and to see what could be done to help (Acts 11:18) (Jackson 137). I would like to think that it was the latter. Whatever the case, it seems clear that they sent Barnabas because he was honorable and they trusted him. They had heard with their ears, and now they wanted to see with their eyes. Rather than all of them going up to Jerusalem, they selected Barnabas. They trusted his eyes to be their eyes. As you know, their trust was not misplaced.

Being from Cyprus, Antioch was familiar territory to Barnabas (Roper 427). When Barnabas came to Antioch and saw firsthand what had taken place, he was “glad.” He saw “the grace” or favor of God on the brethren there. He was convinced that God’s hand had wrought the work in Antioch. Whatever Barnabas’ thoughts were at the time that he left Jerusalem, he was willing to accept what he saw in Antioch. He had an honest and good heart (Luke 8:15). His actions were honest in the sight of God and man (2 Cor. 8:21).

Another assignment in the eleventh chapter of Acts further establishes that Barnabas was honorable. When the compassionate brethren at Antioch “determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea,” they “sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:29-30). Surely, such an assignment shows that the brethren trusted Barnabas and Saul. They were confident that the money in its entirety would reach the elders in Judaea.

Honorable men like Barnabas are encouraging. It is refreshing to find those who are on the inside what they appear to be on the outside. Ben Jonson noted, “When a virtuous man is raised, it brings gladness to his friends, grief his enemies, and glory to his posterity.” Barnabas clearly did all three of these things. His conversation matched the message that he preached (Phi. 1:27).

Humble

Many men in Barnabas’ shoes would have been filled with pride. They would have loved being singled out by the apostles for special honor or recognition (Acts 4:36-37). They would have loved being the go-to guy in the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:22; Acts 11:30). However, Barnabas never let the accolades or assignments go to his head. He had the heart of a servant. Someone described humility as “greatness in plain clothes” (Kimball) Can you not just see Barnabas in a pair of old overalls? Okay, I know they did not have overalls, but you get my point. Barnabas did not think of himself more highly than he should have (Rom. 12:3). He realized that he was just a worm like other men. No doubt, you are familiar with the lines from the hymn *At The Cross* by Isaac Watts:

Alas! and did my Savior bleed
And did my Sov'reign die?

Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?

On one occasion, Winston Churchill joked, “We are all worms, but I do believe I am a glowworm.” Sadly, a lot of men feel this way in seriousness. They shine or glow in their own eyes.

In the eleventh chapter of Acts, we see Barnabas gladly take the second chair. In the midst of great success, Barnabas left Antioch to go to Tarsus “to seek Saul” (Acts 11:24-25). A lot of men would not have wanted to have shared with anyone the kind of success that was taking place in Antioch. They would have wanted all the glory or credit for themselves. However, Barnabas was not a self-promoter. Abraham Lincoln once quipped, “What kills a skunk is the publicity it gives itself” (“Humility”). Sadly, that is true of a lot of men also. However, this was not the case with Barnabas. He was not thinking about himself. He was a servant. Concerning humility, William Temple observed, “Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself at all.” This seems to describe Barnabas rather well. Barnabas was not thinking about himself. He was thinking about the church and what was best for her.

The work in Antioch was getting very large. Some believed that Barnabas needed help. Therefore, he went to Tarsus to seek Saul. Barnabas knew Saul’s skillset firsthand. As you recall, he had earlier sung Paul’s praises to the apostles. He told them how that Paul had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. These words had not been empty praise. Barnabas meant them. Unlike others, Barnabas was not bragging on Paul in hopes that Paul would return the favor.

He was sincerely recommending Saul to the apostles. When he left the additions in Antioch to seek Saul, he was doing so because he believed that Saul could help in Antioch. Maybe, he thought that Saul with his background and training could reach some individuals that he had not been able to reach. It could also be the case that he simply wanted Saul to get in on the success. After all, he was not called the “son of consolation” for nothing. Barnabas may have reasoned that it would be a great encouragement to Saul for him to see and share in what was happening at Antioch. Furthermore, it seems clear that Barnabas knew that Paul was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Acts 22:21; Acts 26:17). He was simply enlisting Saul in the work that God had called Saul to do. Many believe that Saul had been in Tarsus from seven to ten years (Jackson 220). When disputes arose with some Grecians in Jerusalem and they determined to kill Saul, the brethren sent Saul back to his hometown of Tarsus (Acts 9:29-30). He remained in that region teaching and preaching until Barnabas came seeking him. Very little is known about Saul’s time in this region (Gal. 1:21). Some commentators suggest that Paul had been forgotten up there. However, Barnabas knew where he was. He had not forgotten about him. Barnabas would put him into the middle of one of the fastest growing areas anywhere. It would become home base for Paul. From that time forward, Paul’s work will be very visible. In fact, Paul will soon be the central character in the book of Acts.

Barnabas and Saul seem to have worked together extremely well. Their names are joined a number of times in the book of Acts. Sometimes Barnabas’ name is mentioned first (Acts 11:30; Acts 12:25; Acts 13:2; Acts 13:7; Acts 14:14; Acts 15:12; Acts 15:25) and sometimes Paul’s name is mentioned first (Acts 13:43; Acts 13:46; Acts 13:50; Acts 15:2;

Acts 15:22; Acts 15:35).

There seems to have been no jealousy between them. No doubt, some men would have been intimidated by Paul's talents and training. Likely, others would have been jealous of them. However, Barnabas was not. He was more than willing to let Paul be the "chief speaker" (Acts 14:12). As you may recall, the people of Lystra thought that Paul and Barnabas were gods. To be specific, they thought that Barnabas was Jupiter (Zeus) and that Paul was Mercury (Hermes). Although Jupiter was considered the more powerful of the two gods, Mercury was the god of eloquence. He was the spokesman for the gods (Stringer 288). Did you catch that? Eloquence! Spokesman for the gods! Evidently, the fact that Paul had done the majority of the speaking and had done so eloquently convinced the people of Lystra that he was Mercury. If Paul was Mercury, then in their minds, Barnabas had to be Jupiter. I do not know if Paul was always the chief speaker or not. However, I know that he was the chief speaker on this occasion. I am pretty sure that he was always eloquent. Although Barnabas and Saul would eventually have a disagreement, it would not be over who was the most eloquent or who was in the leading role. It would rather be over John Mark, another young man that Barnabas wanted to mentor and bring to the front. Barnabas clearly understood why he was on the earth. Gordon B. Hinckley observed that "being humble means recognizing that we are not on earth to see how important we can become, but to see how much difference we can make in the lives of others."

Happy

In your mind's eye, how do you picture Barnabas? Do you not picture him smiling or laughing? I know that I do. I simply cannot picture the man nicknamed *Encouragement*

without him being happy. Even in the midst of suffering, I think that he must have found a reason to rejoice (Acts 5:40-41; cf. Mat.5:10-12). Although the smile may have temporarily disappeared from his face when he was being thrown out of a city or persecuted in some other way, it soon returned. After all, he had joy in his heart.

I am convinced that we cannot put joy into the hearts of others unless it first dwells in our own hearts. It is the same principle that we often use in regard to love. We cannot love our neighbor or our spouse, at least not as we should, unless we love ourselves (Lev. 19:18; Eph. 5:28-29). Love has to dwell first in our own hearts before we can deposit it into the heart of another. Barnabas was able to give joy, comfort, and encouragement to others because it flourished in his own heart.

First, we see the happiness of Barnabas in the gift that he shared with the needy brethren in Jerusalem.

Luke records that Barnabas, “having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostle’s feet” (Acts 4:37). Barnabas was a giver. It seems clear that no one coerced Barnabas into making this contribution. He did not give it grudgingly or of necessity. He gave it willingly and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7). Like our Lord, he understood the blessing of giving (Acts 20:35). He knew that giving was a grace — an unmerited and undeserved favor (2 Cor. 8:7). Like the Macedonians, his gift must have poured forth from the abundant joy that filled his heart (2 Cor. 8:2). Giving and gladness go together (Acts 2:45-46). The happiest people in our world are not the people who have the most, but the people who give the most. The happiest people are those who have learned to be content no matter what they have (Phi. 4:10-11; cf. 1 Tim. 6:6-8). Many people never enjoy what they have because of what they still want to get. In his

book, *The Hunger for More*, Lawrence Shames described the prevailing mindset today: “More. If there’s a single word that summarizes American hopes and obsessions, that’s it. More money. More success. More luxuries and gizmos. We live for more—for our next raise, our next house; and the things we already have, however wonderful they are, tend to pale in comparison with the things that we might still get” (Jeremiah 185). Rather than this mindset, we need to develop the mindset reflected in the following poem sent into Abigail Van Buren and published in her *Dear Abby* column in February of 1989:

Present Tense

It was spring, but it was summer I wanted,
The warm days, and the great outdoors.
It was summer, but it was fall I wanted,
The colorful leaves, and the cool, dry air.
It was fall, but it was winter I wanted,
The beautiful snow, and the joy of the holiday season.
It was winter, but it was spring I wanted,
The warmth and the blossoming of nature.
I was a child, but it was adulthood I wanted,
The freedom and respect.
I was 20, but it was 30 I wanted,
To be mature, and sophisticated.
I was middle-aged, but it was 20 I wanted,
The youth and the free spirit.
I was retired, but it was middle-age I wanted,
The presence of mind without limitations.
My life was over, and I never got what I wanted.(Lehman)

Heroic refers to one who is “marked by courage and daring.” One who is “supremely noble or self-sacrificing”

(“Heroic”). Christopher Reeve, an actor who is known for his role as Superman, defined a hero as “an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles.” Joseph Campbell defined a hero as “someone who has given his life to something bigger” than himself. I think that Barnabas fits both of these descriptions. *First, Barnabas was bold.*

Luke records, “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming, Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:45-46). Paul and Barnabas were not intimidated by the Jews. They were as bold as lions (Pro. 28:1). Like the great heroes of old, they “waxed valiant in fight” (Heb. 11:34). Though verbal shots were exploding all around them, they boldly stood their ground (cf. Eph. 6:10-17; Eph. 6:19-20; Acts 4:13; Acts 4: 29-31).

Second, Barnabas was sacrificial.

The Jerusalem church sent a letter recommending Paul and Barnabas. In the letter, they described Paul and Barnabas as “men that” had “hazarded their lives for the name of” Jesus (Acts 15:26). Hazarded refers to “persons or things delivered over to do or suffer something.” It means “to give up or over, to surrender, to permit” (Zodhiates, “Paradidōmi”). Paul and Barnabas surrendered their lives to Christ. They were willing to suffer and die for His name (Acts 21:13; cf. Acts 20:24).

I find the bravery and sacrifice of heroes extremely encouraging, don’t you? It is encouraging to see those who willingly sacrifice themselves for the sake of others. Their

courage brings out the courage in us. In the first chapter of Philippians, we see some who gained confidence and boldness from Paul. We read, “And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (Phi. 1:14). Though Paul and Barnabas are dead, they continue to encourage us by their bravery and sacrifice.

Human

What do we mean when we say that someone is human? We mean that they are “susceptible to...the frailties of human nature” (“Human”). This was certainly true of Barnabas. As we have already notice in this lesson, he was one of the best and the brightest in the early church. However, he was not perfect. He was human. John Steinbeck once noted, “Man is the only kind of varmint” that “sets his own trap, baits it,” and “then steps in it.” No one knew better than Barnabas that he was human. In fact, when those at Lystra tried to worship Paul and Barnabas, they made clear that they were “men of like passions” (Acts 14:15). First and foremost, Paul and Barnabas made clear that they were men and not gods. You may recall that Peter had to remind Cornelius of this same thing. When Cornelius fell at Peter’s feet to worship him, “Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man” (Acts 10:26). Please notice the last two words—“a man.” As great as Peter was, he was still just a man. Second, Paul and Barnabas made clear that were “of like passions.” Passions means “feelings” or “affections” (“Homoiopatheís”). Not only were Paul and Barnabas (and Peter) not gods, they were not even super men. They were men who had to bring their bodies and their minds into subjection just like other men (1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Cor. 10:3-5). They were men who sometimes said and did the wrong thing (Mark 8:33).

There are two occasions where the human nature of Barnabas shone through. The first occasion involved Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. Paul records the occasion in the second chapter of Galatians. The contention on this occasion was primarily between Paul and Peter. However, Barnabas was at fault also. We read,

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. (Gal. 2:11-13)

Please note that Barnabas “was carried away with their dissimulation.” *Dissimulation* simply means “hypocrisy” (Zodhiates, “Hupokrísei”). The fact that a man of Barnabas’ stature and spirit got carried away shows just how pervasive this problem was. I suppose that Peter’s involvement shows the same. Most of all, it shows that they were human. The great encourager, for the first time in the Biblical record, was a discourager. His actions, along with Peter’s, must have been very discouraging to the Gentile Christians. I am convinced that when Paul rebuked Peter to the face, Barnabas got the message loud and clear also. If the great encourager could become discouraged, it can happen to anyone. If he could become a discourager, the potential is surely in all of us.

The second occasion when Barnabas' humanity shone through was when Barnabas and Paul disagreed over taking John Mark on a mission trip with them. As you recall, Barnabas was "determined" to take Mark with them (Acts 15:37). *Determined* means "to resolve...purpose after deliberation" (Zodhiates, "Eboúleto"). After a great deal of thought, Barnabas was resolved to take Mark. He clearly thought that it was good to take Mark. However, Paul disagreed. He "thought" that it was "not good" (Acts 15:38). "Thought" means "to think fit, suitable or proper" (Zodhiates, "Axioō"). No doubt, both Barnabas and Paul had their reasons for feeling the way that they did. Luke tells us Paul's reason, but not Barnabas'. Paul did not want to take Mark because he "departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work" (Acts 15:38). Although Luke tells us that Mark left Paul and Barnabas, he does not tell us *why* he left. Many commentators conjecture that he was homesick. Whatever Mark's reason, it was an unexcused absence as far as Paul was concerned. No doubt, Mark's departure made more work for Paul and Barnabas. After all, Mark was their "minister" or servant (Acts 13:5). Paul did not have time to babysit. Barnabas, the great encourager, was evidently convinced that Mark had matured; or at least, he was convinced with a little patience that he could. Barnabas determined that if he was going to err, he was going to do so on the side of grace. Barnabas saw Mark's potential rather than his past. As you recall, he had earlier done the same thing with Paul. John Maxwell noted that "People go farther than they thought they could when someone else thinks they can" (13). Years ago, an experiment was conducted to determine people's ability to endure pain. For example, how long could a bare-footed person stand in a bucket of ice water? They discovered that when there was

another person present offering encouragement, the person standing in the bucket of ice water could tolerate pain twice as long as when no one else was present (25). Barnabas' presence and encouragement kept John Mark going. Someone has noted, "A word of encouragement during a failure is worth more than an hour of praise after success" (Johnson 158). Because Barnabas believed in him, Mark became useful again (2 Tim. 4:11). As you know, he went on to write the second gospel. Who was right, Barnabas or Paul? It is hard to say. Perhaps R. Kent Hughes said it best when he declared, "I feel for Barnabas, and yet Paul is the greatest of the apostles. Perhaps they were both right. No one can rightly blame Barnabas for wanting to give his cousin a second chance, nor can we fault Paul for fearing to trust him again. Our judgment goes with Paul, but our hearts go with Barnabas" (203).

Sadly, the difference of opinion between Barnabas and Paul grew into a very sharp contention (Acts 15:39). In fact, it was so sharp that they separated from each other. Irresistible force (Barnabas) had met immovable object (Paul). Something had to give, so Barnabas and Paul separated from one another. Barnabas took Mark, and Paul took Silas. Who would have ever believed that these two forever friends would have had a falling out? Yet, they did. Who would have ever believed that a disagreement could have derailed this dynamic duo? We could have accepted death, but not disagreement. Yet, disagreement did it. It just shows that they were human. It just shows that it can happen to anyone. It is interesting to note that when Barnabas departed from Paul, he drops from the sacred page. This is the last glimpse that Luke gives us of him. However, we do read again of John Mark, the man that Barnabas sacrificed so much to save (2 Tim. 4:11). Mission accomplished!

Someone has written, “Flatter me, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I will not forget you” (qtd. in Maxwell 50). Although Barnabas is one of the lesser characters of the Bible, he is hard to forget. We remember him because his story refreshes and encourages us.

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CHAPTER 2

And Taught Much People: Encouraging Those Who Teach God's Word

Rick Brumback

No education is as precious as a Bible education. We can know all there is in the world to know about mathematics and science—and without spiritual understanding, we are still truly uneducated. We can know all there is in the world to know about the human body, diseases, and how to heal them—and without spiritual growth, we are still truly ill. We can know all there is in the world to know about finances and money—and without spiritual knowledge, we are still truly bankrupt.

Our early Christian brethren knew that becoming and remaining a child of Jehovah depends upon being taught the Gospel. For this reason they prized teaching the good news of Jesus, a fact we know about the saints who assembled together in Antioch and labored to instruct in the ways of the Lord (Acts 11:25-26; KJV).

A disciple is a follower, but the root word relates to the idea of training. We speak of disciplines of study at the university, indicating an organized program of coursework and training. Yes, a Christian disciple is one who follows

Christ, the Master, but this also includes recognition that Christ provides the education needed to help the disciple mature. The Lord desires all to become His disciples and be saved (1 Tim. 2:4).

But it is impossible for any one congregation or figure to provide the teaching needed to evangelize the world. While this fact may seem self-evident and therefore cursory, its consequence demands attention. Our success in evangelizing the world and edifying the saints depends upon our willingness to have a broad and integrated vision of spiritual education and training. The aim of this essay is to explore how congregations and individual Christians can encourage and enable those who teach, thus increasing the effectiveness of the brotherhood as a whole.

Encouraging Reflects Appreciation

Romans 13:7 speaks of honor being extended to those deserving; this is in the context of civil authorities, but surely the principle is true of other situations as well. Public school systems routinely honor their teachers, and the Lord's church can certainly acknowledge those who labor to spread the Gospel. We must extend our thanks to those who take the time to prepare and share through personal instruction. Though our instructors do not perform this service for the sake of recognition, it is appropriate for us to acknowledge their work, whether with express words of thanks, or a dinner honoring teachers, or actions of kindness in gratitude.

But this appreciation is not simply synonymous with gratitude. Appreciation involves acknowledgement of the task itself—its possibility, its scope, and its challenges. To truly acknowledge the work of another requires us to consider what they have invested, and what they require

from us to do what is so urgently needed. How can the local congregation encourage the development of and successful support for those who teach the good news? That is what we consider below.

Encouraging Includes Empowerment

Imagine a beginning kindergarten teacher, newly graduated from college, starting the school year in August. This figure arrives at the school campus, locates her classroom, and begins to prepare for the upcoming year. But in the course of preparation, she learns that the district has no materials that they will provide. Instead, she is told that she, possessing a college degree in elementary education, is expected to craft an entire curriculum which will not only cover the full range of required subjects, but which also will integrate seamlessly with the material of the other kindergarten teachers and the first-grade teachers who will teach these same children next year. Upon hearing these words, the teacher feels overwhelmed. She had expected that the school district would at least provide the overarching structure for the kindergarten year, as well as the basic materials for her use. She seems defeated even before the first day of classes arrives.

A similar experience can be had by the Christian who volunteers to teach a Bible class in the local congregation. This person is excited, and maybe a bit nervous, at the prospect of teaching a class from the Bible. Though she or he knows that this is an important task, it can simultaneously be a daunting one, especially if the person is not already a teacher by profession and training. And then if the church does not provide both an overarching structure as well as the particular materials that the teacher is to use, even the most ameliorated apprehension can morph into

a true phobia—the task has flowered into a fully grown intimidation, and the teacher is now overwhelmed.

The leadership should be sensitive to this possibility and take strides to empower the volunteer instructor to succeed. What can be done? First, the leadership can have in place a curriculum of study that addresses the broad educational needs of the entire body, from the youngest to oldest student. Perhaps this is a multi-year curriculum that moves through both Old and New Testament texts in a set number of years. Perhaps the structure includes topical studies such as church history, marriage and family, or other key themes. Whatever the curriculum consists of, the leadership needs to establish this plan, maybe utilizing the input of the regular teachers or church members. An integrated plan of study provides the most effective and seamless learning environment.

In implementing this broad curriculum, the leadership can make certain that individual teachers have the materials needed for their particular classes to run smoothly. Few teachers are prepared to craft their own teaching materials from scratch; this undertaking would require more training and time than many of our volunteers have. Instead, with the brethren providing the supporting material, the teacher can focus on communicating clearly and effectively with the class audience.

When selecting a curriculum to use either at church camp, for Vacation Bible School, or the regular Bible class program, the curricular materials should satisfy several needs. According to Ron Butterfield, professor of education and elder in the Lord's church, the material should address:

1. Age Appropriateness—What should students be taught at each grade and age level?

2. Sequence—In what order should content and concepts be taught to students?
3. Scope—How much and in what depth should content and concepts be taught?
4. Instructional Methodology—How should content and concepts be taught to maximize student achievement?
5. Instructional Resources—What materials and resources are necessary for teachers to successfully deliver the new curriculum? (6)

Quality teaching material also gives attention to applying the Bible's teachings. It is not enough to study the Bible text without inviting the student to make personal application—perhaps ask class how a particular teaching could be applied, or asking them to name someone who is known to practice a certain action, etc. This application is what constitutes the transformed living Paul mentioned in Romans 12:2. Finally, the curriculum employed should recognize the verbal, plenary nature of the Bible's inspiration. Just as Paul wrote that all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16-17), so the class materials should demonstrate this same high view of the Word. Any curriculum that does not meet these last elements likely is not worth utilizing at all.

With the skills and Bible knowledge represented among our brethren, perhaps we can invest in creating curricula and other teaching material for broad use among churches. We have trained teachers, preachers, authors,

audio/visual experts, and professors, all of whom could pool their expertise to craft such materials that can be used without reservation. These materials may include textbooks, lectureship texts, Bible class material and study guides, digital books, and audio/visual materials. This wide array is seen in secular studies or interests, so why not develop high quality material on spiritual themes? I must add this caveat however, once more from brother Butterfield: “[The creation of a new curriculum] often becomes so overwhelming that the endeavor is never completed” (6). Before commencing a project of this scope, the brethren involved should determine whether the undertaking can be brought to a successful and timely conclusion. If not, it would be better to acquire a curriculum that satisfies the criteria listed above.

Now, some may state that in years past great Bible teachers required little additional material to teach effectively, and that is no doubt true. But perhaps there are additional considerations that must be factored in. For example, in decades past it was more likely in America that a child attended church services of some sort and had personal experience in a Bible classroom. Today that is not to be assumed. In fact, it is more likely that those adults being converted to Christ are *not* from homes where church life was common. That means that these adults, our teachers and future teachers, may have little experience in helping children and students learn the Bible. Any assistance that a congregation can provide will be a boon to the teacher. If the teacher is already well-seasoned, then this additional material may be superfluous; but if the teacher is willing though somewhat unpracticed, the quality of curriculum material will have an enormous impact on the quality of teaching.

Encouraging Involves Training

This involves a recognition of the responsibility that accompanies speaking in God's name (Jam. 3:1). It is no casual affair to claim to speak in the name of the Most High. Instructing others in spiritual matters demands a prepared teacher who (1) knows the tenets of Jesus' words, (2) lives them faithfully, and (3) is ready to share those teachings with others to help them walk in the paths of righteousness. Consider the case of Ezra; we are told in Ezra 7:10 that "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." Before this scribe could have a positive influence on others, he had to school himself in the ways of God. Every effective teacher of God's Word is first a good student of God's Word. Just as sermons become "old hat" when the preacher fails to study and continue learning, so the Bible class lesson suffers when the teacher fails to study. The knowledge needed to guide inquiring students extends beyond the elements of that Sunday's class lesson. One task of the instructor is to help the student gain a comprehensive view of the teachings of the Bible, but this work cannot be accomplished unless the instructor continually broadens his or her own horizons of knowledge.

I encourage congregations to provide formal training to Bible teachers and potential teachers, perhaps done by periodically hosting a teacher-training workshop. Such an event would allow attendees to learn what they can do in guiding a class to understand and absorb Bible teaching. The aim is to identify the general keys for great teaching, and then also to specify the actions our teachers can take to turn the classroom time into a top-flight experience for both teacher and student. Great teaching does not happen spontaneously any more than great preaching happens without preparation.

We know when we hear a powerful sermon that the speaker has invested time and expertise into crafting a superior lesson and delivery. How can we assist our teachers to be similarly effective?

Certainly we can provide good Bible training from the pulpit, through printed materials, and in our current classes. In other words, we prepare teachers by giving solid grounding in the Bible text for all members. But we can go even further, training more teachers by incorporating them into the classroom environment as assistants. We know that Timothy received the benefit of being mentored personally by Paul as they traveled together (Acts 16:1-3), and we can make use of this approach to increase the number of people ready to teach by having them assist in a mentoring context. The teacher-in-training can assist during an entire Bible course, helping the students and learning how to instill the Bible's teachings for transformation. In addition, the congregation can make available materials which offer instruction on how to teach well. In this way, prospective teacher gains valuable training and the church gains additional workers capable of helping others grow spiritually. We can add here that this is not limited to increasing the number of Bible class teachers; using this same approach can increase also the number of brethren capable of having private studies with conversion prospects.

Great teachers know how to make the Bible message come alive. Instructors can be reminded that there are several methods of presenting, explaining, and fleshing out content that can enhance Bible study (and sermons) so that the text is understood and application made. Even Jesus and other Bible figures frequently made use of the following approaches, which we list with both benefits and cautions/reminders for each.

1. *Stories/Illustrations/Parables:*

Benefits:

a. Can draw in the audience and make material more clear in a number of ways.

b. Can help to illustrate the Biblical content itself. Consider a parable.

c. Can help to illustrate the application of Biblical content.

d. Can help to cement in one's thinking the lesson and its value.

e. May be similar to what someone else has experienced.

Cautions/Reminders:

a. Use illustrations only as a highlight to the lesson or sermon. Do not make it *be* the sermon or lesson.

b. Use things familiar for the story. Not childish, but easily connected. You do not want to have to explain the story which is supposed to help explain the lesson!

c. Practice telling the story or illustration. Have the best possible form of presentation—succinct, clear, engaging. Use vivid words.

2. *Questions*

There are different types of questions that can be posed, whether in class or in a sermon.

a. Questions of content—focuses on facts, deeper observations (e.g., Phi. 3:7-8 – Why did Paul consider these things but loss?), connecting teachings or thoughts (e.g., Col. 3:1; Col. 2:12).

b. Questions of meaning/significance—these focus on the application and ramifications of the Biblical teaching (e.g., What would be the effect if people started honoring God's marriage law?).

c. Questions of immediate application—focuses on what we can do today to make these teachings become

effective in our lives (e.g., What can I do today to ensure that I will have a healthy marriage that will not end prematurely? What message will I pass to my children? How will this teaching change the way my spouse and I argue?).

d. Open- and closed-ended questions. They both have their purpose and value.

Benefits:

a. Questions, well-planned, can “connect the dots” for the students. There will be breakthroughs in understanding.

b. Questions are one of the best ways for “discovery” learning.

c. They steer the class in a certain way by presenting a particular line of thought.

Cautions/Reminders:

a. Do not let the class teaching time be lost in endless questions.

b. Questions need to be *well-planned* to be effective and generate the desired responses.

c. They are to help students grasp the material, but they should not dominate the material.

3. Case Studies

These can be valuable as the class works through a problem that could be quite common to the human situation, and they are challenged to formulate a response based upon the principles being learned.

Benefits:

a. They can be tailored to any audience. They are to deal with situations of life, and kids have connection to these matters just as adults.

b. They challenge especially in the application of principles, so they would be good in the period following the presentation of Biblical content.

c. They match real life. The scenarios, done right, are genuine and significant.

Cautions/Reminders:

a. Time is required to do this, so make sure a good amount of time is allotted.

b. They must be planned carefully. What are the possible outcomes that the teacher needs to know?

c. They aid in recognizing the significance and application of Biblical content, but they should not dominate the class.

4. Lecture

Lecture time can be one of the best, and it is certainly the most common, methods of teaching.

Benefits:

a. It can incorporate the elements above such as illustrations and provocative questions.

b. It is easier to plan the direction of the class and avoid losing focus.

c. It is useful in any teaching situation, so not restricted like other methods.

Cautions/Reminders:

a. Lecture can be dry and boring.

b. *Good* lectures have every bit as much planning as any discussion class, maybe more.

c. There may be the tendency for the students to think only as the teacher speaks, i.e., less discovery learning. The teacher has to be so well prepared that the students hang on the words of the lecture.

As we have mentioned, Jesus and others used these pedagogical elements to educate, and we can help our teaching to be more effective by incorporating these elements to aid student learning and application. Any time invested in developing these high quality lessons will certainly be repaid in student growth.

Encouraging Promotes Healthy Attitudes Toward Teaching

The great evangelist Paul once said of his own work,

You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me...how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:18-21)

Preaching and teaching are not simply vocations or exercises; they are efforts, demanded by God, to help individuals come to know the Gospel message and be saved for eternity. We must be motivated by a love for our fellow human beings and their own spiritual health.

What is necessary for a person to be a great teacher? Greatness is not assured simply because a teacher possesses a degree in education, or because the individual has been placed at the head of a classroom. Though knowledge of truth is mandatory, the heart's involvement is just as crucial (Eph. 4:15). Consider the following helpful list of characteristics and attitudes shared by great teachers.

1. Great teachers set high expectations for all students. They expect that all students can and will achieve in their classroom, and they don't give up on underachievers.

2. Great teachers have clear, written-out objectives. Effective teachers have lesson plans that give students a clear idea of what they will be learning, what the assignments are and what the grading policy is. Assignments have learning goals and give students ample opportunity to practice new skills. The teacher is consistent in grading and returns work in a timely manner.
3. Great teachers are prepared and organized. They are in their classrooms early and ready to teach. They present lessons in a clear and structured way. Their classrooms are organized in such a way as to minimize distractions.
4. Great teachers engage students and get them to look at issues in a variety of ways. Effective teachers use facts as a starting point, not an end point; they ask “why” questions, look at all sides and encourage students to predict what will happen next. They ask questions frequently to make sure students are following along. They try to engage the whole class, and they don’t allow a few students to dominate the class. They keep students motivated with varied, lively approaches.

5. Great teachers form strong relationships with their students and show that they care about them as people. Great teachers are warm, accessible, enthusiastic and caring. Teachers with these qualities are known to stay after school and make themselves available to students and parents who need them.
6. Great teachers are masters of their subject matter. They exhibit expertise in the subjects they are teaching and spend time continuing to gain new knowledge in their field. They present material in an enthusiastic manner and instill a hunger in their students to learn more on their own.
7. Great teachers communicate frequently with parents. They reach parents through conferences and frequent written reports home. They don't hesitate to pick up the telephone to call a parent if they are concerned about a student. ("Signs of a Great Teacher")

Though this list clearly was written with the secular classroom in mind, these principles apply to teaching in Bible classes as well.

It is essential that the Bible teacher have a personal commitment to the students that will see him or her through the occasional difficulties and challenges of education,

especially when working with youth. It can be demanding to work closely with adolescents who differ not only in personality, ability, and desire, but who also arrive at the classroom from differing home environments which give various levels of support or hindrance to the pupil's spiritual growth. In light of these challenges, the instructor should prepare for the work by remembering continually the principles that positively shape the teacher's attitude and conduct. One text called such principles the "Ten Commandments for Serving Youth":

1. Thou shalt understand youth, their needs, the situation in which they live, and the personality factors that stamp them as adolescents.
2. Thou shalt have an interest in their interests and a concern for their concerns.
3. Thou shalt be absolutely honest and fundamentally sincere in all thy dealings with youth.
4. Thou shalt have immeasurable patience with youth and take enough time in thy ministry for them that youth may feel thou art saying, "You are worthy of my time."
5. Thou shalt have genuine tolerance for youth and always give them the benefit of any doubt.
6. Thou shalt have a sense of humor which permits thee to laugh heartily and to unbend thy stuffy, ecclesiastical self.

7. Thou shalt be undiscourageably optimistic and seek to channel the eagerness and enthusiasm of youth in ways that make for good.
8. Thou shalt have perspective; the ability to see what these irresponsible, boisterous, and trying adolescents can become.
9. Thou shalt have implicit confidence in youth to believe they can develop the divine characteristics God has placed within their lives.
10. Thou shalt seek always to live so close to Christ that thy ability to inspire youth toward Christian decision and Christian faith is always a channel for the will and power of God. (Spann 88)

The teachers in our Bible classes and similar outreach efforts must demonstrate openly their concern for students, their zeal for and preparation to share the subject matter, and a positive disposition toward the class, treating students with respect and kindness. These teachers are the very figures who will present and clarify the Bible's teachings, and who will reveal how these teachings can be applied in order to transform the students' lives. By doing these things, they answer the prayer of Jesus, Himself a figure with great compassion and concern for people: "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the

Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Mat. 9:36-38).

Encouraging Means Recognition

Who are the ones teaching God’s Word? Clearly the local preacher is included in this group, but who else should we recognize as teachers, or potential teachers, of the Gospel? One of the most overlooked groups might be the parents! While congregations encourage their members to be regular Bible students, having home devotionals is the single most important setting for Bible teaching. What can the local congregation do to help advance spiritual training in the members’ homes?

We should recognize that, while the members may truly desire to have meaningful and regular home devotionals with Bible study, they may not have the knowledge or confidence to lead such studies without aid. Consider the situation of parents who have themselves only recently obeyed the Gospel, and in their enthusiasm they want to have regular times of worship and study at home. Because they are themselves new Christians, they may not know what to teach or how to begin. Or consider the family with children ranging from elementary to high school age. They might benefit from some help in organizing their home studies to be effective for all the ages present. These, and similar situations also, may be the obstacles to overcome so that members can study and learn with their families.

In light of these possible challenges, the local leadership or preacher can suggest materials to use in home studies; the interactive book *The Incredible Century: The Rise of New Testament Christianity* is designed specifically for such a use and illustrates how materials, including digital materials, can aid private study. Now the families can apply their energies

to learning and sharing this material together without feeling overwhelmed by the breadth of available Bible content or by their own unfamiliarity with the Bible. If we do not see parents and family members as potential teachers, at least in the home, we are missing the opportunity to help in the most significant training area possible (see Deu. 6:1-9). Remember that Timothy, from the time he was an infant, was taught by his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 3:15).

We also can be on the lookout for teacher candidates in the congregation. Let us not be afraid to ask a brother or sister directly if they would consider becoming a teacher. Be sure to remind them of the resources that will be provided to help them flourish. When they ask questions or express their concerns, we should listen intently; perhaps we can address these concerns, or at least provide suggestions or insights that may keep the possibility open for them to teach. But make no mistake—**the church must be championing the teaching of the Gospel just as it champions preaching work.** Perhaps there is some significance that in Paul's words to Timothy he did not use the term for preaching or evangelizing, but rather for teaching: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

Finally, I encourage the shepherds of the congregation to be teachers in Bible classes and private studies. The ability to teach others is a qualification for becoming an elder (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9), so this suggestion is consistent with that mandate. When the elders are seen at the front of the class, helping others learn and grow, answering questions thoughtfully and helpfully, several things happen. First, that overseer is seen as a person directly engaged in helping others, rather than appearing aloof or unapproachable. Second, the

elder is then clearly seen as a knowledgeable student of the Bible, and the confidence in leadership increases. Finally, it may also help the leadership know what the teachers need from the elders to direct the Bible classes effectively. In this way not only is the class material itself taught, but also the relationships between leadership, the other instructors, and the membership as a whole are strengthened.

Conclusion

How joyous it will be to rest in heaven and look across the sea of faces, recognizing those individuals whom we aided by teaching them God's truths. But living a disciple's life—a transformed life—is only possible when a person understands the Scriptures' teachings and incorporates them into his life. When we, the church, take seriously our charge to teach, we are carrying that treasure, the Gospel, in our earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7). We then stand in a long line of men and women who were each so convinced of the significance of Jehovah's message that they could not remain silent. Instead, they shared the Word so that others could be blessed also. Carrying this forward must be our task in the twenty-first century. Help, support, and encourage Bible teachers—without them, where would you be?

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CHAPTER 3

And Took With Them John: Encouraging Others Through Mentoring

Patrick Morrison

It is a great honor and privilege to be a part of this year's Power Lectures. The brotherhood has been and continues to be blessed by the work of the Southaven congregation. I want to commend the elders for their willingness to host this good lectureship every year. I also want to thank brother Wade Webster for his hard work and dedication in editing the lectureship volume and making it available for our benefit. This year's theme on the subject of Barnabas is sure to bless all of those who will hear the lessons presented as well as those who will read the book. This year's Power Lectures is one volume that I am thankful to be able to add to my library. Truly, we will all be encouraged by so many lessons centered upon the theme of encouragement.

Barnabas quickly gained a reputation in the early church as a faithful and devoted follower of Jesus. His benevolence and selflessness led the apostles to rename him "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36; NKJV). No doubt, encouragement is what comes to mind when we think of Barnabas and rightfully so. While not much is revealed

to us upon the pages of God's inspired Word concerning the life of this good man, what is written captures a life worthy of emulation. Who among us does not need or long for encouragement? Who among us does not get down, discouraged, and disappointed from time to time? Everyone needs a Barnabas. Think of how much stronger every congregation would be if every child of God sought to be an encourager! Barnabas encouraged the Jerusalem church by exhibiting a spirit of sacrificial giving (Acts 4:32-37). Barnabas encouraged the apprehensive brethren to accept Paul as a true convert of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 9:26-27). Barnabas encouraged a young man to greater service in the kingdom by taking him under his wing (Acts 12:25; Acts 15:37-39). Barnabas became a mentor to John Mark, making a profound difference in his life in so doing. A mentor is defined as "somebody, usually older and more experienced, who advises and guides a younger, less experienced person" ("Mentor"). Barnabas served as a trusted adviser to John Mark, teaching by both word and deed what it meant to be a faithful servant of Jesus. The encouragement given through this mentoring led John Mark to be a very useful worker in the church. Let us notice how this unfolds before making some practical applications.

Upon hearing news of the gospel reaching Syria, the leaders of the church in Jerusalem commissioned Barnabas to go preach the good news as far as Antioch (Acts 11:22). It should come as no surprise to us that the first thing that he does upon reaching the Gentile converts in Syria is to encourage them to cleave to the Word of God (Acts 11:23). Barnabas then searches out Paul and brings him to Antioch where they continue a year with the church (Acts 11:24-26). While in Antioch, Agabus comes and prophesies about a world-wide famine to come (Acts 11:27-28). The Gentile

converts in Syria determine to send relief to their Jewish brethren in response to the dearth that is coming (Acts 11:29). Is it not amazing what a little encouragement will do? The brethren in Antioch no doubt felt indebted to the saints in Jerusalem for bringing them the gospel, so in anticipation of their brethren in Judea being in need, these precious saints purpose to give as they are able so that their brothers in the Lord might not suffer want. Is it any wonder that a spirit of generosity and exhortation prevailed in a congregation where Barnabas was present? With the offering of the Christians in Antioch entrusted into their care, Paul and Barnabas journey to Jerusalem to present these funds to the elders of the church (Acts 11:30). Having fulfilled their mission, the two return to Antioch with John Mark accompanying them (Acts 12:25).

If we are not careful, we may read over this passage without giving it much thought. But the events that unfold in the life of John Mark while he is with Paul and Barnabas will shape him into a faithful servant of God, though not without difficulties. John Mark was a nephew (or cousin, as some commentators suggest) to Barnabas (Col. 4:10), likely younger biologically and perhaps spiritually as well. His mother, Mary, was well known among the brethren in Jerusalem. While Peter is in prison at the hands of Herod, many of the brethren assemble together in Mary's house to pray (Acts 12:12). Mary was probably a widow, for there is no mention of her husband, the father of John Mark. She was evidently a wealthy woman, for she had a house large enough in which the brethren could assemble and she had servants as well. Both Mary and John Mark were likely converted by Peter because the apostle later refers to Mark as "his son" (1 Pet. 5:13). We know not the reason why Barnabas and Paul selected John Mark to accompany them, but they must have seen a great opportunity to mentor a young disciple. Perhaps

they sensed a need for John Mark to have a positive male influence in his life. Perhaps they could see his spiritual potential that previously was untapped. Whatever the reason, their decision is instrumental in developing another stalwart saint for the kingdom of God. And so, for John Mark, the journey begins.

Upon arriving in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas are set apart by the Holy Spirit to be sent into Asia Minor and surrounding regions to preach the gospel (Acts 13:2-3). The missionary team travels to Seleucia, then sets sail for Cyprus (Acts 13:4). In the city of Paphos, Paul and Barnabas encounter Elymas, a sorcerer who attempted to thwart their efforts (Acts 13:8). By the power of God, Paul strikes Elymas blind, and Sergius Paulus, the chief deputy of the city, comes to believe on Jesus (Acts 13:10-12). From thence the company sails to Perga in Pamphylia, where John Mark departs from the team to return to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Inspiration does not reveal to us the reason John Mark turned back. Perhaps he had never been far from home and was now feeling a bit home-sick. Perhaps he had been the primary help to his mother since his father was not around and he was now feeling guilty for being gone on such an extended journey. Perhaps he was not prepared for the opposition he had witnessed in Paphos, so he left for home before the going became even more difficult. Any one of these reasons, or none of them, may be why John Mark turned back. Whatever the reason for his departure, it became a source of contention between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-39). As they are preparing to return to the locales they had recently visited on their missionary journey, Barnabas was determined to take John Mark with them again. The word translated *determined* indicates that Barnabas had considered the matter carefully and had deliberated with himself as to whether or not this

would be a wise decision. After contemplating it, Barnabas had resolved that John Mark would travel with them. Paul was not of the same mind, thinking it not good that he be allowed to go again. The apostle likely felt that John Mark was not cut out for the task at hand, having lost confidence that he could endure the rigors and trials of taking the gospel to all the world. Barnabas, however, would not be dissuaded. He stood firm in his resolve to take John Mark. Paul stood equally firm in his refusal to take the young man with them the second time. Paul and Barnabas had come to an impasse. The work that they were doing was too important to be scuttled due to a disagreement. Even though the contention divided the two missionaries (Acts 15:39), an alternative arrangement was made: Paul took Silas with him to Syria and Cilicia, and Barnabas took John Mark with him to Cyprus.

What might have become of John Mark had Barnabas not mentored him? Would he have ever left the confines of Jerusalem to take the gospel to others? Would others have given John Mark a second chance to prove himself? Would Paul's lack of confidence have destroyed his faith? We do not know the answers to these questions because Barnabas did take the time to mentor John Mark. Under the tutelage of his mentor, John Mark showed himself to be a valuable asset in the work of the Lord. During Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, Mark is with him. Paul now refers to this one in whom he had earlier lost confidence as his fellow-worker in the Lord (Philemon 24), and urges the brethren in Colossae to receive him (Col. 4:10). Perhaps Paul's refusal to allow John Mark to accompany the missionary team a second time had caused others to view him with suspicion. Paul harbored no ill-will toward John Mark, a reflection of the apostle's willingness to forgive, but also a reflection of the faithfulness of his younger fellow-laborer. John Mark had not just proven himself to be

a capable servant of the Lord, but he had especially proven himself useful to Paul. As the shades of night are beginning to draw closed upon the life of the prisoner of the Lord, Paul sends request to Timothy in Ephesus that he might send Mark to Rome. He had become “profitable” to Paul’s ministry (2 Tim. 4:11). John Mark became a mighty servant of the Lord, even becoming a vessel by which God transmitted His Word to us! None of this might have been had Barnabas not taken the opportunity to be a mentor to a young man in need of guidance and encouragement.

The Responsibility to Be a Mentor

As we mature in the faith, we have an awesome obligation and a wonderful opportunity to mentor others who could benefit from guidance and encouragement. If the Great Commission is to be carried out effectively, then it is imperative that we in the church see our responsibility to help mold and instruct those who are younger in the faith. God designed the church and the home to function in this way. Parents are a child’s first mentors. Faithful stewardship demands that we be consistent in modeling Jesus before our children, by way of instruction as well as example (2 Cor. 4:2). Before Samson was ever born, Manoah asked of the angel of the Lord, “How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?” (Jud. 13:12; KJV). Think of how much stronger our homes would be if every parent took seriously this opportunity to order their children in the way that God would have them to go! Home is the training ground for future soldiers of the cross. What are your children seeing in your home (Isa. 39:4)? Do they see a father and mother who love God supremely (Mat. 22:37)? Do they see a home where Christ and the church are honored, respected, cherished, and esteemed (Mat. 6:33)? Do they see a home where God’s

plan for marriage is upheld (Heb. 13:4), and where father and mother love each other in a way that reflects the love Christ has for his bride (Eph. 5:22-33)? Do they see a home where mom and dad are walking the walk instead of just talking the talk (1 John 2:6)? Do they see a home where God's word is taught at every opportunity (Deu. 6:6-7)? Parents, please do not underestimate your role as a mentor to your own children! Your faithfulness to the Lord, or lack thereof, will shape the souls of your precious little ones. Do not sin against your children by failing to keep the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; Gen. 42:22). Do not miss out on the opportunity to bring your children up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Sadly, far too many homes are not what God intends for them to be. Millions of children grow up in homes where ungodliness and immorality are front and center in the lives of their parents. Alcohol, drugs, pornography, sexual promiscuity, foul language, and the like are modeled before impressionable young minds in myriads of homes. Then there are homes wherein immorality and ungodliness are not necessarily the norm, but where parents are indifferent to the moral, emotional, and spiritual well-being of their children. Large numbers of young ones are being raised with no encouragement to embrace eternal verities. Then there are homes where mom and dad give the appearance of godliness but do not live it out in their everyday lives (2 Tim. 3:5). Here are parents who have enough religion to make themselves miserable. They attend services when it suits them or when their consciences bother them enough. They leave services speaking evil of the preacher and the elders and gossiping about brethren in order to make themselves feel better about their hypocrisy. These parents sing, "O, how I love Jesus" but then never bow their heads in prayer around the dinner table

or open up their Bibles at home. In these homes, parents make a mockery of the faith of Jesus Christ, and they set their children up for discouragement and disappointment. Who will step up and take these young ones under their wings? Who will see the untapped potential within these precious souls and patiently guide them toward eternal life in Jesus Christ? If God's people will not take advantage of such a wonderful opportunity, rest assured that Satan and his forces will step in and "mentor" these young minds.

Our obligation to mentor extends beyond those who are simply young in years. We must also help to guide and encourage those who are young in the faith. If we are going to be successful in making disciples of all nations, then we must continue to mentor the next generation of Christians, teaching them to observe all the Lord has commanded us (Mat. 28:19). Being a mentor to one in the faith of Jesus Christ is not necessarily relegated to those who are more advanced in years. Timothy, a relatively young preacher, was instructed by his mentor, Paul, to teach faithful men, who in turn would teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2). In fulfilling this command, there can be no doubt that Timothy helped to encourage and guide some who were biologically his senior. Older women are charged to teach younger women to be "sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:4-5). We also have a blessed privilege to mentor not only those who are young in the faith, but also those who are weak in the faith. There are many within the body of Christ who long ago obeyed the gospel, but they have yet to progress beyond spiritual infancy (1 Cor. 3:1-3). There must come a time in the life of every child of God when we should be able to teach others the very same gospel we obeyed (Heb. 5:12-14). Now,

we can lament the fact that many children of God need to move beyond milk to meat, or we can seize the opportunity to help our brothers and sisters by means of admonishment and encouragement to reach their full potential in Christ. Some have been overtaken by sin and need a brother or sister to reach out in love and meekness to help them find their way again (Gal.6:1-2). Some have wandered away due to indifference and need someone to seek them out and guide them back to the Great Shepherd (Luke 15:4-7). Some can be dealt with in a very gentle way, while others require tougher measures to bring them back to the path of right (Jude 22-23). The point is that we have ample opportunity within the body of Christ to serve as mentors to others. May we embrace this Divine obligation and see it for the wonderful opportunity that it truly is

The Requirements for Being a Mentor

Some may seem intimidated at the thought of mentoring another, perhaps feeling inadequate or unprepared. God does not call the perfect or the brilliant-minded or the uber-wealthy to this task. He calls the faithful to mentor to the lost, the weak, the broken-hearted, the wayward, or the babe in Christ. Those things which are required of a mentor are things that every child of God should and must possess. Successful mentoring requires a great investment which, if followed, will yield great dividends.

Mentoring requires a substantial investment of love. God, the source of love (1 John 4:7), showered His love down upon us in the giving of His Son (John 3:16), seeking after our greatest good (Rom. 5:6-10). Those who have come to know the love of God in obedience to Jesus desire to radiate that love to those around them. “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:11). Realizing

the God reached down in love to poor lost sinners ought to cause us to reach out to the lost around us with that same love. We ought to love lost souls, because we were once among the lost. Knowing the joy and peace that we have now in Christ (Rom. 8:1), we want others to find these marvelous blessings in Jesus. Our hearts should be stirred by compassion when we look upon our lost relatives, friends, neighbors, and co-workers (Mat. 9:36). When was the last time you took a lost soul under your wing in order to lead him to the Lord? If you have ever known the joy of helping to guide and encourage someone to obey the gospel, then you know that your investment of love was well worth it. We also reach out to mentor the saved because we love the brethren. We have been saved so that we might exhibit a genuine love of the brethren (1 Pet. 1:22), the badge of true discipleship (John 13:34-35). God has brought us together in Christ so that His love might be made known to the world. When we see brethren who are hurting, struggling, discouraged, and in danger of falling away, love should motivate us to pull them to our side and encourage them. It is sad that some brethren live by the philosophy of, "Well, I know the Bible says I am supposed to love my brethren, but that doesn't mean I have to like them." One has a hard time determining from whence such a sentiment comes (1 John 4:20-21)! A mentor will weep with those that weep and rejoice with them that rejoice (Rom. 12:15). The love of Christ compels us to take advantage of every opportunity to mentor others (2 Cor. 5:14).

Mentoring requires a substantial investment of patience. It is humbling to consider just how patient God has been with us. His longsuffering spared our lives so that we might have opportunity to repent and obey (2 Pet. 3:9). When we consider how patient He still is with us, it ought to drive us to our knees in humble penitence (Rom. 2:4). Those who are

willing to take on the responsibility of mentoring another must always keep the longsuffering of God in mind. How often have we wanted to give up on one who seemingly would never obey the gospel, even though we had labored diligently to lead them to salvation in Jesus? How many times have we despaired because of a brother or sister who just cannot seem to get it right in spite of our best efforts to reach out to them? In dealing with the lost, the wayward, the hurting, the indifferent, and even the rebellious, we must be longsuffering and forbearing (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). So often, when considering our own faults we want others to be patient with us, but in dealing with the faults of others we want immediate resolution and correction. A wise mentor will exercise great longsuffering and will keep on keeping on in order to help a soul to heaven.

Mentoring requires a substantial investment of time. Faithful stewardship demands that we make wise use of the time that God has entrusted into our care (Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5). Our opportunities to help influence others to walk with the Lord are limited and fleeting (John 9:4). What could be a better use of our time than mentoring someone in the faith of Jesus? We fill our schedules so full of insignificant, unnecessary things that we think are essential that we rarely have time for that which is truly important. Show me what consumes a man's time, and I will show you what consume a man's heart. With each passing moment, souls are entering into eternity unprepared to meet God. The lost surround us—at work, at school, at play, perhaps even at home! Are we reaching out to them, trying to persuade them to come to God through Jesus Christ? The wayward, the weary, the discouraged, and those who are barely hanging on can be found in every congregation of God's people. Are we taking the time to encourage and uplift them? All of us have time

at our disposal. We can choose to waste it or to invest it. A wise mentor realizes that an investment of time in the life of one who needs guidance and encouragement will reap great rewards in this life and in the life to come (Mark 10:30).

The Results of Being a Mentor

What happens when we seize the opportunities that abound around us to mentor others in the faith of Jesus? You do not have to look far to see what mentoring accomplishes. The Bible is replete with example after example of successful, godly mentoring. Notice what happens when faithful men and women of God take the time to help guide and encourage those who are in need of such.

Mentoring helps to develop powerful preachers. What would have become of Timothy had Paul not adopted him as his son in the faith? While it is true that Timothy had a good foundation in the Bible (2 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 3:15), he needed the influence of a godly man in his life to make up for the lack of involvement in spiritual matters of his earthly father. Timothy may well have become a gospel preacher without Paul's mentoring, but the apostle saw in him one in need of greater instruction and encouragement by which to bring Timothy to his full potential. Consider also Paul's involvement in the life of Titus (Gal. 2:1). Here is another who came under the influence of Paul who turned out to be a great servant of the Lord. Think about the gentle encouragement and guidance that Aquila and Priscilla gave to Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). Here was one who was preaching the baptism of John after the baptism of the Great Commission had come into effect. There would be some today who would immediately write Apollos off as a heretic and a false teacher and would mark him as one unworthy of fellowship. Thanks be to God that this godly couple saw in Apollos great potential! They

took him aside and gave him greater instruction in the truth. Because of the way that this situation was handled, Apollos was made better by it and became a mighty preacher (Acts 18:28). Think of how much poorer the early church would have been without great preachers like Timothy, Titus, and Apollos!

Mentoring helps to develop great leadership. Moses had a keen father-in-law who helped teach him many things about being a good leader (Exo. 18:13-23). In the fields of Jethro, Moses learned how to be a good shepherd. At the feet of Jethro, Moses learned how to be a good servant. Moses understood that the leadership of God's people was greater than any one man, and so he mentored a young Joshua to take over the reins as leader when Moses could no longer serve in such a capacity (Exo. 24:13; Num. 11:28). Joshua would become a great leader of Israel thanks in no small part to the tutelage of Moses.

Mentoring helps to edify the saved. Think back to the example of Barnabas and John Mark. Who knows what might have become of John Mark had Barnabas not stepped in and mentored him? He might have grown so discouraged that he abandoned the faith. He might have simply faded into mediocrity. I am sure that you would agree that John Mark would not have become the faithful and useful servant that we read about in Scripture if it had not been for Barnabas. In turn, John Mark became a needed source of strength and encouragement to others (2 Tim. 4:11).

Conclusion

The importance and value of mentoring a soul in the way of the Lord cannot be overstated. Without mentoring, the next generation is deprived of much needed instruction, guidance, and encouragement, and the effects will be seen

and felt throughout subsequent generations of God's people. Take a look around. Someone desperately needs you to be a Barnabas to them. It may be the young boy from the broken home across the street. It may be your co-worker who is looking for the truth. It may be a sister who is discouraged by the circumstances of life and who is ready to throw in the towel. It may be that young man you see at every service who needs just a bit of encouragement and guidance so that he might become a great gospel preacher. Opportunities abound. Will we close our eyes and ears to those who need a mentor and salve our consciences by convincing ourselves that someone else will take on that responsibility, or will we rise to the occasion and embrace the opportunities placed before us? Be a Barnabas and make an eternal difference in someone's life!

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CHAPTER 4

Encouraging God's People In Song

Burt Jones

This morning brother Rick Brumback told us of a man, Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas. This Levitical “son of consolation” from Cyprus believed in his mission for God so much that he sold his land and brought the price of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet. Brother Vega will remind us of some of the other attributes of this good man, one of which is ethical behavior.

One common thread runs throughout the life of Barnabas—the importance of encouraging one another. This week you will hear some gifted preachers cover almost every aspect of this quality placed in each one of us to develop it to the glory of God. We will be told of his faith, his being full of the Holy Ghost, and what made Barnabas so loveable.

One of the most potent arrows in our quiver of defense against the prince of this world is the robust, exhilarating, exciting, jubilant praise of our Lord in song, unfettered by the use of instrumental music. For the next few minutes, let us examine this sometimes misunderstood part of our worship.

Let me tell you some statements I have heard from my brethren and others over the years:

- “I’m not going to worship tonight. They’re just having singing.”
- “I don’t see why I can’t just **read** the words to the song. That’s just as good.”
- “He’s not a good song-leader.”
- “The acoustics are awful in this auditorium.”
- “Why do they keep singing the same songs week after week?”
- “She **teaches** singing at the high school. Why can’t she **at least help** with the song-leading?”
- “I can’t carry a tune. I would **never** be able to learn music.”
- “I think God will understand. We’ve never been a singing congregation.”

Brethren, for some inexplicable reason there has been over the last century a battle over and a major misunderstanding of this one part of our worship—singing!

Instead of **encouraging** one another, exhorting one another, we seem to continue offering silly and nonsensical excuses for placing our worship in song on some ritualistic back burner. It is long past time to acknowledge this shortcoming and to accept and follow Bible Truth about this one area of our worship which we will carry with us to heaven.

We are to have the Spirit of God dwelling, through His word, in our hearts in one way by seeking and encouraging the purity of our spirit by singing songs of praise and thanksgiving. We are to sing and make melody with our hearts unto the Lord. It is done by speaking the word of God in song. The purpose is not to **perform** but to **praise** God.

Man did not invent singing, nor did he write the first song. We know from the book of Revelation 5:8-9 (ASV), the four beasts and twenty-four elders sing a “new song”

(which implies that “old” songs have been known and sung). In Revelation 14:3 the 144,000 sing a new song before the throne which only the redeemed of the earth could learn. And in Revelation 15:3 the victorious sing the “song of Moses and the Lamb.”

This lesson can seem deceptively elementary at first glance. Of course, we know that as New Testament Christians we are to worship and sing **with the spirit and with praise** unto the Lord with our supplication and veneration unencumbered by man-made musical instruments.

Over two thousand times in the Bible this statement is found—“Thus saith the Lord.” At one time, the church of Christ spoke these words with almost every breath. No longer is that true. We must return to militant teaching, singing, and preaching and encourage others to do the same.

Today, as has been true for one hundred years, there are those **within** the fellowship of the body of Christ who are raising these questions who actually say, “There is really nothing very much black or white, but everything is relatively grey.” What they mean is simply this—truth is **not** absolute. The **situation** determines everything. Brethren, we do not believe this. We believe that far more things are black and white than people like to admit and that there are only a very few things that are in the grey area. Singing praise unto the Lord **any other way** than by the pure, unadulterated utterances of the human voice is **not** a grey area.

Some believe that the Scriptures provide an all-sufficient guide in matters of doctrine, worship, and morality. Others feel that where the Scriptures do not specifically forbid a thing, the worshipper is at liberty to use his or her own judgment and wisdom in the matter.

Now, if you fail to get another thing out of this lesson, please understand the crucial difference between

singing praise to God during Old Testament and New Testament worship.

Instrumental music was authorized or allowed as worship under the Old Law, but it died when the Law of Moses was abolished at the death of Christ. This is absolutely fundamental to the understanding of many things in religion, but certainly applies to the issues **today**. Men would like for you to believe that instrumental music is a matter of opinion; it is a matter of expediency, take it or leave it. And yet, the Bible very plainly teaches that instrumental music was a part of worship under the Old Testament law. In 2 Chronicles 5:11-14, we read:

And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, (for all the priests that were present had sanctified themselves, and did not keep their courses; also the Levites who were the singers, all of them, even Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and their brethren, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them a hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets;)

Now notice what happened:

It came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking Jehovah; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and

cymbals and instruments of music, and praised Jehovah, saying, For he is good; for his loving kindness endureth for ever; that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of Jehovah, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of Jehovah filled the house of God. (2 Chr. 5:13-14)

God accepted their worship; God **allowed** their worship. It involved the singers; it involved all those with instruments of music. As far as the law was concerned, it was authorized.

One more, read Second Chronicles 29:25-28,

And he set the Levites in the house of Jehovah with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet; for the commandment was of Jehovah by his prophets.

It was commanded! God commanded it; it was an authorized element of Old Testament worship.

And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt-offering upon the altar. And when the burnt-offering began, the song of Jehovah began also, and the trumpets, together with the

instruments of David king of Israel. And all the assembly worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt-offering was finished. (2 Chr. 29:26-28)

Listen to that! All the congregation worshipped! The priests were offering burnt-offerings on the altar, the singers were singing, those with trumpets and harps were playing and yet inspiration says, "They all worshipped." It was a part of worship. We will notice a little bit later, it was not just an aid or expedient. These passages show that God Himself **allowed** it. God blessed it and God's glory filled the house of God where it was done.

But just as surely as it was worship under the law, the Law of Moses died at the cross of Christ. I think it is unthinkable that anybody in the church would deny it, but just to make it logical and so that you can study it, let us read and see. In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus said:

Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished.

Everything about the life of Christ was to fulfill perfectly the law of God. He was born. He lived and He died under the Law of Moses, the only man to keep it perfectly. In John 17:4 He said, "I glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given me to do." In Matthew 5:17 He said, "I am not come to destroy...but to fulfill." It was to be

made full; it was running over with completion; nothing was left out. At His death, He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Therefore, what Jesus came to do, Jesus did. He came to fulfill the law; the law was fulfilled. It was taken out of the way; it was nailed to the cross.

If there is a repetition of what was found under the old, restated in the new, we do not keep it today because it is in the old; the old has been completely done away. We live under the new and whatever God has commanded us to do is done because it is found in the new by the authority of Christ and the apostles.

We live under a new law, a new covenant or testament. In Matthew 26:28, Jesus said as He instituted the Lord's supper, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (KJV). In Matthew 17:5, God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."

How many times have you heard your preacher say that Jesus has all the authority that Moses had and all that he did not have? He has all the authority that David had and all that he did not have. Jesus had all authority. And so, everything under the law is gone once and forever.

Then again, 2 John 9 is a crucial passage. It reads,

Whosoever goeth onward and abideth
not in the teaching of Christ, hath not
God: he that abideth in the teaching, the
same hath both the Father and the Son.

No wonder liberals and sectarians say that this has no application to all the teaching of Christ. Do you know the reason they want to pervert it? It is because it stops them cold in their tracks. If they can get around 2 John 9, they are really

running. But they cannot pass. Second John 9 refers to the fact that Jesus Christ is the authority; He is the power and the authority of Almighty God. If it is not authorized by Christ, it is not allowed in any way whatsoever.

Every man who wants to justify instrumental music finds himself face to face with three more passages in the New Testament. He finds himself face to face with God in Galatians 1: 6-9 where the apostle Paul says:

I marvel that ye are so quickly removed from him that called you in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel; which is not another gospel only there are some that trouble you (**and bless your heart, they do trouble us**), and would pervert the gospel of Christ (**and they are perverting it**). But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema.

To practice instrumental music in worship today is to go beyond the teaching of Christ. I have shown that the law and all that was under the law stopped at the cross of Jesus Christ. First, it goes beyond the doctrine of Jesus Christ. It goes beyond the teaching of Christ. It goes beyond His authority. Notice what He said in Matthew 28:18, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." He commissioned the apostles to preach the gospel. He taught the children of God to teach the very same thing that they had taught. He pronounced a curse in Galatians 1 on the man that taught anything different. He plainly pointed

out in passages such as John 14:26 that the apostles would be guided into all truth; that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance everything that Christ had said. In John 16:13 this is repeated: When the Holy Spirit comes, “he will guide you into all the truth.” So what do you have? You have the promise of Jesus himself that the Holy Spirit would, through the apostles, bring to their remembrance everything that He (Christ) had said. They would further be guided into all the truth and He would teach them all things. He did not teach them about instrumental music. And so, instrumental music is beyond the authority of Christ; it is beyond the things that the Holy Spirit brought to their remembrance. It is beyond that which He guided them into and it is beyond the teachings of the Spirit. The Bible says in 2 Peter 1:3 that God has given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness; He did not allow instrumental music; therefore, instrumental music does not pertain to life and godliness. Brethren, this could not possibly be plainer, even for a ten-year-old child. He could sit down and understand these passages and learn very, very quickly. Jesus said in Matthew 16:19 that “whatsoever thou shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.” But he did not bind this on earth; therefore it was not a part of that which God had previously bound in heaven. These things are so simple that I learned them the first year that I started preaching. So it goes beyond the authority of Jesus Christ and beyond the principle of faith.

The Bible very definitely teaches that a life of faith is a life that rests on explicit authority. I heard a gospel preacher the other day, who knows the truth on instrumental music say, “Not everything that we do has to be authorized.” I said, “If it isn’t, you better quit doing it.” What he failed to see was the fact that God can authorize generally. It has to either be

authorized generally or specifically or it is not authorized at all. Somebody says, "If you mean it has to be authorized if I go over to the power company to work, then a man is authorized to do it because the Bible says that whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." It is authorized. It is a command of God. Sometimes we feel that is about the only way we can authorize it! It is honorable. It does not mean we like it. There are a lot of those jobs we do that we do not like, but they are authorized; everything we do, everything we believe, everything we teach. Period! When you come to the New Testament you find numerous cases where God has specifically authorized that which He wants done. Even on baptism, we have no problem—yet. But it will come. God specified that it was to be a penitent believer. We fought the man-made churches over infant baptism a hundred years ago and we might have to fight our brethren over it again. But the point is this: God specified sing; nothing else will do. Anything else violates the specific command and authority of Christ. I have listed some New Testament passages that involve singing:

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out unto the mount of Olives. (Mat. 26:30; Mark 14:26)

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns unto God, and the prisoners were listening to them. (Acts 16:25)

And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, Therefore will I give praise unto thee among the

Gentiles, And sing unto thy name.
(Rom. 15:9)

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit,
and I will pray with the understanding also:
I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing
with the understanding also. (1 Cor. 14:15)

And be not drunken with wine, wherein
is riot, but be filled with the Spirit;
speaking one to another in psalms and
hymns and spiritual songs, singing and
making melody with your heart to the
Lord. (Eph. 5:18-19)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly;
in all wisdom teaching and admonishing
one another with psalms and hymns and
spiritual songs, singing with grace in
your hearts unto God. (Col. 3:16)

Saying, I will declare thy name unto my
brethren, In the midst of the congregation
will I sing thy praise. (Heb. 2:12)

Through him then let us offer up a
sacrifice of praise to God continually,
that is, the fruit of lips which make
confession to his name. (Heb. 13:15)

Is any among you suffering? Let him
pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise.
(Jam. 5:13)

Now, that is what the New Testament says about singing. It involves the kind of songs, the attitude, the spirit, the manner, the object. It involves everything that God wanted in it. It automatically excludes everything that God did not want included. There is not a word of authority for an instrument in it in any shape or form. This is all that God says in the New Testament about singing. This is exactly what we practice in worship. When a man says that he can do something else, he is under obligation from God to prove it.

The objections offered by the instrumental music supporters are no good. First, they say it was used in the Old Testament. This falls of its own weight because we do not live under the Old Testament, and we do not live by the Old Testament laws, for to do so would violate the law of Christ. Galatians 5:4 reads, "Ye are severed from Christ, ye would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace." Every time a man refers to the Old Testament to justify instrumental music, he does the very two things that we affirm. He first shows that there has to be some authority for it, and secondly, it is not in the New Testament. And brethren, that is all we affirm, that there has got to be authority for it, but it is not found in the New Testament. There are many things under the Old Testament that nobody would allow today or at least in some areas. I started to say polygamy, but it has gotten to where today men want two or three or more wives. So you cannot use that as well. But the truth of the matter is that whatever we find under the Old Law is gone forever. Some men say, "Well, it is used in heaven." This is pure guesswork because the description of heaven is highly figurative. It shows simply the relationship of the redeemed of God to the pleasure and joy of heaven. If that argument is worth anything it would be worth too much, for you find bowls of incense and horses tramping around heaven.

Another argument that is made is, “The New Testament does not forbid it.” It does. Now listen to this argument well. Some of our folks, I guess, would defend taking cocaine for pleasure. I do not know. I have not heard them yet, but that does not mean that they would not do it. The Bible forbids taking cocaine for pleasure just like any other of the hallucinatory drugs though it nowhere says, “Thou shalt not take cocaine.” But I say with all the power of my being that the New Testament forbids it. It forbids it with every Scripture that tells how to live and on the ground that your body is a temple of God. The Bible teaches that the child of God needs every faculty he has and anything that is that dangerous and that deceptive is forbidden by Almighty God even though there is not a specific mention of it. It is forbidden indirectly. There was a time when you could have said that the New Testament forbids drinking, but now folks have outsmarted us preachers. Someone says, “Where in the word of God does it say that you can’t drink ‘moonshine’ or beer”? (As if some new revelation has come along). If God had spoken directly, “Thou shalt not drink beer,” some smart aleck would say, “Where is the one that says wine?” and off we would be again. It is the same old problem, whether people want to recognize the authority of God or whether they do not.

God did not say, “Thou shalt not put cake and ice cream on the Lord’s table”; but I say that it is forbidden, for God did authorize what **should be done**. He authorized fruit of the vine and He authorized bread—period. It is not enough to say that we believe in the Lord’s Supper, but we will take the cake and ice cream, too! The man that takes the cake and ice cream does not believe in the passages that authorize bread and fruit of the vine only. Those are just the facts. Sometimes people say that the New Testament does not forbid it. It does

forbid it and God does not have to say it like Burt Jones to be said in order for it to have been said.

Then there are those who say it is just an aid. It never has been. It was authorized worship under the old law. If it today is simply an expedient, then who changed it from authorized worship to expedience, and by whose authority? It has not been changed in the mind of God. You are never going to get those folks where they cannot make an argument. It is like the old drinker. If you prove to him it is wrong to get drunk, he will say, "Well, where does it say it's wrong to drink beer?" If you prove that to him, he says, "Well, where does it say it's wrong to drink wine?" And on and on you go. They do not recognize the specific authority of God. It is not just an aid. The God of heaven says to preach the gospel. There are PowerPoint lessons. I can use them to expedite preaching the gospel, but if that power poin PowerPoint changed one jot or tittle of the gospel, it would be wrong. I can use a microphone, but, if by some way of mechanics, it changed the truth of the gospel of Christ, it would not be an aid, but an addition. It changes the basic nature. God said, "Sing." He did not say, "Sing and play." And anything that adds another element changes basically what God has bidden. You can put the Lord's Supper on a table two feet deep, but add another element, you are wrong. That is the way God's authority stacks up. (There is a difference in an aid and an addition. An aid expedites a given command—the other is of another kind—different.) There are two kinds of music. God specified but one. But if instruments **are** part of worship, which one will you choose? We must encourage one another to sing literally with the spirit and understanding every service, every song.

Then there is an argument that is much like this. People say, "It is just like lights and baptistries and meeting houses and pitch pipes and song books." If it is, you are going to have

to get rid of them. But it is not. A New Testament helps us to teach the word of God. A song book helps us to sing. It does not change the essential nature of singing. It does not add another element as would playing. It would be wrong. It is the same old argument in just another disguise. If baptistries change the command to baptize, the baptistries would be wrong. Baptize means one thing; it means to plunge, to dip, or to immerse, which is a one-time action. You cannot get poured or sprinkled out of it, unless you have a dictionary. You cannot get it out of the truth of God. The same thing is true about baptistries, lights, pitch pipes, and song books.

I believe with all of my heart that we have shown the case to be true, that instrumental music violates the authority of Christ; and therefore is unauthorized worship for the children of God. I believe that our brethren believe this and will believe it stronger in the future. And therefore, we cannot extend our fellowship to include those who have searched the Scriptures and have come to the opposite conclusion. We are not denying that some of them are good people and that some of them are friends of ours, but we are humbly saying that God Almighty will not allow us to fellowship that which split the body of Christ, which is unauthorized and throughout Bible history has always been the reason why God simply condemned the worshipper for offering unauthorized worship. And for that reason, we will not extend our fellowship to include those who practice it or teach it or even who believe it to be true. May God help us to study these issues with an open mind and an open Bible.

Finally, I think you and I during this Power Lectureship ought to remember the distinct possibility that Jehovah God has kept an eye upon us as a people in our civil and our religious privileges. We have come to be exceedingly great. We are feasting on the fat of the land. Our wealth is unlimited.

Our powers on earth and in cyberspace cannot be measured. We build greater malls, do bigger things in every way. But I wonder if we pause to determine if we are preparing ourselves for even greater tasks than did those precious brothers and sisters in whose steps we walk. Are we rearing greater men and women of God? Are we developing Davids or growing Goliaths? Are we establishing an environment where we are truly encouraging one another to gain spiritual nourishment through singing praises to His name?

We stand today upon the ground prepared by others. And as we **voice** His praises and **His message** from multiplied masses winging its way to the great throne of heaven itself, let us **remember** that, "As for me and my house, we will serve the **Lord**" (Jos. 24:15; KJV).

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CHAPTER 5

For He Was A Good Man: Encouraging Ethical Behavior

Matt Vega

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *ethics* as “the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles.” It involves discerning right from wrong and then applying those standards of behavior with wisdom. For the most part, “ethical theory aims to bring order into ordinary thinking by telling us which [of] our ideas are really relevant to what we should do, and which ones should be ignored” (Hunt). Modern ethical theories can be very complicated and subtle and go by names such as Aristotelianism, Kantianism, and Consequentialism. However, even more troubling than their abstract complexity is the fact that modern ethical theories not based on God are prone to reductionism. They take something good but act as if it is the only thing that matters. They then try to use their narrow concept of good to unlock every ethical problem. For example, some presuppose the only ethical consideration should be what the community thinks is right. Others emphasize the importance of individual rights and thus insist no one has the right to tell someone else what to do. Still others conclude it does not

matter what we do, as long as we get the right results or at least please as many people as possible.

However, true ethics springs from God, Christ, and the gospel. This triad forms the backbone of Christian ethics. It gives us all we need to develop a system of discerning good and evil and captures the wisdom needed to apply this moral knowledge. While ethics is necessary for eternal life, it also helps to define human flourishing in this life. It enables each individual to live a life of value, knowledge, and beauty, all of which are basic aspects of our well-being (George 85-90). Ethics provides the “basic requirements of practicable reasonableness” needed to make sense of everything in life from our play to our friendships and, of course, our religion (George 100-101).

One of the greatest exemplars of God-centered, Christ-centered, and gospel-centered ethics was an early first century Christian named Joses, who was also named Barnabas (Acts 4:36). He was a Levite and a native of Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean off the Syrian coast. It is no small thing that the Scriptures record that Barnabas “was a good man” (Acts 11:24). This is a bold claim. After all, Jesus Himself warned the rich young ruler, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God” (Mark 10:18). Given Jesus’ stern warning, why does the Holy Spirit inspire Luke to ascribe this title to Barnabas? It was certainly not because Barnabas had lived the perfect life. The Scriptures affirm, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). On the other hand, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount also said, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Mat. 5:48). Likewise, Paul commanded us to “be imitators of God as dear children” (Eph. 5:1). In other words, Christians are to “be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Yet how are we supposed

to do that if no one except God is holy? How was it possible for Barnabas to achieve such a status? There is much we can learn about being “good” from Barnabas who not only lived a truly ethical life, but who, as we will see, encouraged the same ethical behavior among his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

God-Centered Ethics

True ethics are, first and foremost, theological. The word *theology* literally means “the study of God” (Grudem 67). God provides the objectivity and authoritativeness needed to constitute a legitimate system of ethics. In particular, God’s character, creation (including the human conscience), and commands all shape, to one degree or another, our ethics. Each of these is examined below.

God’s Character

God is the final standard of good (Ps. 100:5). “There is no higher standard of goodness than God’s own character and his approval of whatever is consistent with that character” (Grudem 91). Therefore, any truly Christian system of ethics requires us to delve into the entire Bible to appreciate fully God’s character and emulate that in our lives. Paul declared that “since the creation of the world [God’s] invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that [we] are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). God perfectly embodies all of the various moral attributes—such as justice, mercy, and love—necessary for ethics. For example, God is love (1 John 4:8) and the Most Holy (Isa. 6:3). God’s grace and kindness are evidenced by all the good He has done here on earth (Acts 14:17). By the same token, God’s justice can be clearly seen because “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”

(Rom. 1:18). Both the Old and New Testaments contain numerous examples of God, directly or indirectly, approving or condemning certain human conduct and beliefs (Compare Lev. 10:1-2 and Acts 5:1-5). “For all His ways are justice. A God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He” (Deu. 32:4).

God’s Creation (Including The Human Conscience)

Some knowledge of moral truth is universal because God has structured aspects of Himself into the way humans think (Cameron 222). God made us in His image (Gen. 1:26). We are like God in that we can reason and have intellect, will, and emotion. We are also capable of emulating God’s communicable attributes like love, justice, and mercy. Even more remarkably, without necessarily any personal knowledge of the Scripture, “all people feel the weight of the moral law” (Budziszewski xx). The thief knows stealing is wrong. The adulterer knows the wrong of sleeping with his neighbor’s wife. Deep down the murderer knows the wrong of murdering (Budziszewski 3-4). We call it having a conscience, and it is that sense of right and wrong instilled in humans that produces guilt when violated. Speaking of the Gentiles who did not have the written law of God, but nevertheless practiced many of its basic tenets, Paul declared they “show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)” (Romans 2:14-15; see also Romans 1:19).

Accordingly, the vast majority of the world recognizes a number of universal truths. For example, most societies still have some concept of murder (although many countries tolerate it by a different name such as abortion or euthanasia). Most also agree parents owe some obligation to their children, and visa versa, although the exact particulars of those mutual

duties can differ from culture to culture. There are even some remaining vestiges of sexual immorality such as incest, although now that homosexuality is widely accepted, at least in Western countries, it too may soon become viewed as just another sexual preference (Budziszewski 214).

At the same time, there is also another universal tendency to try to evade that moral knowledge and to even deceive ourselves as to what we know (1 Cor. 3:18). Paul warns that repeatedly ignoring one's conscience can cause the person to become desensitized to sin (1 Tim. 4:2; see also Eph. 4:17-19). In addition, God's creation (including the human conscience) only points us to some universal truths. For example, natural law tells us nothing about salvation. This is why is it so critical that we recognize the Bible as the perfect and inspired Word of God.

God's Commandments

Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Every individual is obligated to determine the reasonableness of the claim that the Bible is inspired, or "breathed out by God." The Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25) has left the task of reaching a verdict on this matter to each of us as individuals, much like members of a jury. The evidence demonstrates it more probable that the Bible was inspired of God than any alternative explanation. However, the "burden of proof" is on non-believers. It is not enough to simply say you do not believe in the Bible. The skeptic has to explain why it is still the best-selling book in the world. The skeptic must then point to a better-preserved ancient document or a more reliable one. The Bible is the best-preserved ancient document known to man (Butt) and is without any genuine contradictions (Jackson, "Does the Bible?"). According to

the formal rules of logic, two statements can be properly said to be contradictory only if they “necessarily have opposite truth values” (Hurley 535). While there are difficult passages in the Bible that appear to disagree, “one need show only the possibility of harmonization between two passage[s] that appear to conflict in order to negate the force of an alleged discrepancy” (Jackson). For example, most alleged “contradictions” between the various gospel accounts can be easily explained by interpreting one passage as supplementing rather than contradicting the other (compare John 20:1 and Mat. 28:1; Mark 16:1). Honest scholars have harmonized or shown the possibility of harmonizing and therefore disproved every alleged contradiction in the Bible to date. Finally, the skeptic must also disprove dozens of Old Testament prophecies and their perfect fulfillment by Christ hundreds of years later and against all odds. The issue is not whether it is possible the Bible is not what it says it is, but whether it is sufficiently probable that is the case.

All of that is to say that true ethics presupposes that men moved by the Holy Spirit accurately conveyed God’s truth to their original audience, and those inspired words have been providentially preserved to this day. It is for that reason that the Holy Scriptures “are able to make you wise” so “that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 3:17). Jesus further promised us that if we abide in His Word, we “shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Although the promise that we shall “know” the truth implies that it has been clearly revealed to man, the promise is conditioned on us “abiding” in His Word. Truth ethics requires that we study the Scriptures for ourselves (Acts 17:11). While it is not always easy to understand all parts of the Bible (2 Peter 3:15-16), we must be spiritually minded and willing to “receive

the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:14). We must train ourselves to distinguish good from evil (Heb. 5:14) and continue in the faith (Col. 1:23).

Unfortunately, in this post-modern age many people no longer believe in truth, at least not moral truth. They contend that all moral truth claims are power plays and unnecessarily exclusive. They mistakenly believe that the only things that are rational are things that can be measured according to the scientific method. According to these modern skeptics, everything else is a matter of opinion. By effectively reducing truth to the empirical, they are no longer able to intelligently talk about justice, beauty, or morality. As a result, they become guilty of “suppress[ing] the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). Those that perish will do so, according to Paul, “because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 The. 2:10-12).

While many choose to ignore them, the Bible contains numerous divine commands that inform our ethics. For example, the four Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John alone record more than 500 commands coming directly from the mouth of our Lord (Piper 34-35). For example, Jesus told his disciples “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34). Where there is no specific rule directly on point, the Bible contains a wealth of spiritual principles to “fill in the gaps” so to speak. The following are just a few examples:

1. The Principle of Authority (Col 3:17; Mat. 28:18-20)—“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the

name of [by the authority of, MV] the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

2. The Faith Principle (Rom 14:23; Rom. 10:17)—“But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.”

3. The Principle of Humility (Mat. 23:12)—“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

4. The Matthew Effect (Mat. 13:12; Mat. 25:29)—“For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.”

5. The Stumbling Block Principle (1 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 14:13)—“But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.”

6. The Principle of Expediency (1 Cor. 6:12; 1 Cor. 10:23)—“All things are lawful, but all things are not helpful.”

7. The Glorification Principle (1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Cor. 10:31)—“For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s”...“whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

Application

There is plenty of evidence that Barnabas was God-centered and lived his life accordingly. After declaring Barnabas a good man, verse 24 goes on to explain that he was “full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” A similar term is used to describe Stephen who was declared “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5). Since the apostles did not lay their hands on Stephen or the other deacons until after their appointment, this cannot denote a miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit (Jackson 66). Instead, as Wayne Jackson explained, “[f]ull of the Spirit’ almost certainly suggests that these men were rich students of the Old Testament Scriptures, and that

the influence of the Spirit, via that medium (cf. Eph. 6:17), had made a dramatic impact in their lives. In other words, they were godly men” (Jackson 66). Since “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17), it only stands to reason that Barnabas was likewise “full of faith” because he was a diligent student of the “engrafted” Word (Jam. 1:21; KJV).

The term *engrafted* suggests a kind of transference takes place in a Christian that knows and obeys the truth, which goes beyond mere book knowledge. God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4) as opposed to “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). It requires a heart transplant of sorts by divine “operation” (Col. 2:12; KJV), where God’s nature rubs off on us and we “put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24). This transformation (or metamorphosis) comes first and foremost by “prov[ing] what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). This “renewing of [the] mind” is part of what qualified Barnabas as a good man. As the Psalmist declared, “[t]he steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way” (Psa. 37:23).

Christ-Centered Ethics

With regard to studying God’s word, Paul advised Timothy to “[b]e diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Although beyond the scope of this article, there is a great deal involved in “rightly dividing the word of truth.” In addition to knowing basic principles of hermeneutics and having a proper understanding of Biblical authority, anyone who wants to

study God's Word to determine how to live must understand there's a difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. While the entire Word of God is inspired and true, the Old Testament was directed to the Jews while the New Testament is universal in nature and authoritative today. That does not mean that the Old Testament has no value for us. Romans 15:4 tells us that "whatever things were written before were written for our learning." There are many crucial lessons we glean from studying the Old Testament Scriptures. After recounting the sins committed by ancient Israel during their 40 year journey between Egypt and Canaan, Paul wrote, "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the end of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11). Nevertheless, God's Word reveals that the Old Testament (the Mosaic Covenant) was delivered for a specific purpose and when that was fulfilled, it was replaced with a New Testament, or new covenant. In fact, this was predicted by the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah who wrote, "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31). The writer of Hebrews began the letter by describing how "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son" (Heb. 1:1). After pointing out that Jesus is the new High Priest, the writer of Hebrews argued "for the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law" (Heb. 7:12). Finally, Paul explained why the old law was given in the first place when he told the Galatians, "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor" (Gal. 3:24-25). Thus, Christian ethics are not based on the law of Moses, but rather on the law of Christ.

It is more than a truism to say that Christian ethics must be Christ-centered. When Peter declared that God, by His divine power, has “given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness,” (2 Pet. 1:3) he went on to explain how exactly; namely, God gave us “the knowledge of [Christ] who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Although studying God’s Word serves many purposes, including working out our own personal salvation, equipping Christians to evangelize others and mutually edifying the church, the ultimate goal of divine truth was perhaps best described by Paul in his letter to the church at Ephesus:

Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ. (Eph. 4:13-15)

Application

Barnabas encouraged the new converts at Antioch to keep their hearts and, by extension, their lives, Christ-centered. When the Jerusalem church learned that the gospel had been preached to Greek-speaking non-Jews in Antioch and that

a great number believed and turned to the Lord, they sent Barnabas to Antioch, no doubt because of his reputation for encouraging new converts. Barnabas' birth name was Joses or Joseph; however, the apostles named him Barnabas (which is translated Son of Encouragement) presumably because of his special talents in this area (Acts 4:36). It is interesting to note more precisely how Barnabas encouraged them. Luke tells us Barnabas "encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord" (Acts 11:23). This admonition reflected a mature, Christ-centered system of ethics. Instead of simply giving these new converts a list of do's and don'ts, Barnabas focused, first, on their purpose of heart, and second, on their newfound relationship with the Lord. True ethics is inward focused and requires both mind and heart. Jesus declared, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the treasure of heart brings forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil things" (Matt. 12:35). At the same time, ethics is also outward focused and requires not only external rules, but also relationships. As a direct result of this very strategic sort of inside-out encouragement, "a great many [more] people were added to the Lord" (Acts 11:24).

Moreover, Barnabas did not stop there. He convinced Saul to come to Antioch and "for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people" (Acts 11:26). No doubt they imparted, as Paul always did, the teachings of Christ, including his moral (or ethical) teachings. The fact that this learning process took a whole year suggests that encouraging ethical behavior is neither simple nor quick. These rules must not only be learned but also "purposed" in our hearts and put into practice in our daily lives.

Gospel-Centered Ethics

Finally, true ethics must be gospel-centered. Barnabas's ethics were deeply connected to his understanding of the gospel. He did not just believe the gospel; he really got it. This was evidenced on at least three occasions, each of which is discussed below.

Generosity at the Cross

The first time we are introduced to Barnabas we learn he “having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:36-37). This ethical behavior was clearly shaped by the gospel. When Paul encouraged the church at Corinth to be generous, he did not appeal to the old law of tithing. Instead, he first noted that the generosity of the churches of Macedonia stemmed from the fact that “they first gave themselves to the Lord” (2 Cor. 8:5). Then he reminded the Corinthians, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). In other words, Christians are generous because of the generosity of Jesus on the cross. If money is too important to you and keeps you from giving like you ought, it may be because of your lack of belief in the gospel. In stark contrast to such disbelief, Barnabas was no doubt so thankful for salvation in Christ that he gladly sold his property to help others in need. This event also explains why Barnabas was called a “good man.” The Psalmist declared, “A good man deals graciously and lends” (Psa. 112:5).

A Second Chance

The second time we read about Barnabas in Scripture he was advocating on behalf of Saul of Tarsus. When Saul (later called Paul) was first converted, the early Christians were understandably “all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26). It was Barnabas that

took Saul before the apostles and vouched for him (Acts 9:27). Barnabas had nothing to gain from speaking up for Paul—who by his own admission was the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). In fact, Barnabas did so at great risk to his own reputation. Nevertheless, Barnabas boldly declared to the other apostles all the details of Saul’s powerful story of redemption, and Saul was finally accepted (Acts 9:27). Barnabas’s actions were a direct outgrowth of his intimate knowledge of the true meaning of the gospel.

Barnabas was keenly aware of the fact that, even though he did not deserve it, God had given him a second chance. This is the fundamental implication of the gospel and is the gestalt of true ethics. If Christ was willing to give Barnabas a second chance, how could Barnabas not be willing to give Saul another chance as well? As Paul later put it, “God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8; KJV). Just as Christ “humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phi. 2:8), Barnabas adopted that same ethic of humility and service for his life. Like Jesus taught in the parable of the unworthy servants, Barnabas understood that “when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have [only] done what was our duty to do’” (Luke 17:7-10).

In essence, what really made Barnabas a “good man” was that he understood he was, in reality, not good—not in any absolute moral or ethical sense. While being “full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” certainly entails obeying the gospel (2 The. 1:8), walking in the light (1 John 1:7) and walking according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1), it cannot mean that Barnabas perfectly kept all of the ethical commandments of Christ Jesus. It is true that the Scriptures repeatedly declare that if we love

God, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15; John 15:14; Luke 6:46; 1 John 5:2-3). However, these verses refer to keeping all of God's commandments, including availing ourselves of God's provisions for the continual cleansing of our sins. As John explained, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). In fact, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Moreover, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:10).
Seeing the Grace of God

His deep understanding of the gospel was also likely the reason Barnabas was sent to the Gentiles in Antioch, or at least why he was so successful in ministering to them once he got there. The early Jerusalem church consisted primarily of converted Jews. While many understood they were saved by grace through faith, some ("those of the circumcision," Acts 11:2) were still stuck in the trap of trying to justify themselves by how "good" they thought they were and continued to cling to the importance of their Jewish heritage. Therefore, many were suspicious of these early Gentile converts because they had no spiritual pedigree and no spiritual track record.

When Barnabas was sent to Antioch, the centurion Cornelius and his household had only recently been converted in Caesarea (Acts 10:17-48). Although Cornelius was known to be a "just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nations of the Jews," (Acts 10:22) Luke records, "Those of the circumcision [Jews] who believed were astonished...because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also" (Acts 10:45). Even more recently, others "of the circumcision" had strongly rebuked Peter for eating with Gentiles (Acts 11:2). Those Jewish Christians believed there was a difference between

Jews and Gentiles, presumably because they were still clinging to the belief that their nationality was the real reason why God accepted them. After Peter told them his vision from the Lord, the Scriptures record that “they became silent; and they glorified God, saying ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (Acts 11:18). Despite this important admission, however, the very next verse reveals that the Jews of the *Diaspora* continued “preaching the word to no one but the Jews only” (Acts 11:19). Arguably this implies that many of these early Jewish Christians still did not really believe (or understand) the gospel at the heart level.

Before we judge these early Christians too harshly, however, we should ask ourselves how often we are guilty of the same thing. One of the reasons why the church may not be growing more today is our lack of belief in the gospel. The world can tell when we are trying to be justified by our own moral record, our own spiritual pedigree, or by how well our children turn out rather than by the blood of Jesus Christ. If that is how we really measure how “good” we are, then we will not be able to help feeling superior to someone whom we perceive as spiritually lazy or not trying. If so, we may be the reason that some potential converts are being pushed away rather than being drawn closer to God.

Regardless, that was not the case with Barnabas. Barnabas worked towards eradicating these legalistic tendencies of the Jewish Christians in the early church. Barnabas might have been chosen to go to Antioch because he was from Cyprus, which was the same island that some of the Jews that had preached in Antioch were from (Acts 4:36; Acts 11:20). Regardless of why he was sent, however, there was no hint of suspicion or prejudice on Barnabas’ part. As sinful as some

of these pagan Hellenists who obeyed the Gospel must have seemed to him, Barnabas fundamentally understood that in God's eyes he was just as guilty and deserving of death as they were, but for the blood of Christ which washed away all his sins (Acts 22:16). Consequently, Luke simply recorded "when he [Barnabas] came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad" (Acts 11:23). Barnabas' open acceptance of these new Hellenist converts encouraged the same ethical behavior of love for all the brethren—regardless of race, nationality, and religious background (or lack thereof)—throughout the first century church, and still does today.

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CHAPTER 6

Encouraging Daily Bible Study

Chris Clevenger

One of the greatest needs for the churches of Christ in this decade and the decades to come is Biblical literacy. While preachers, elders, Bible class teachers, and a host of seasoned Christians survey the current spiritual development of God's people and reminisce about the Biblical education of previous generations, generations of disciples are being reared with little or no comprehension of the overall message of God's Word. According to a survey conducted in 2012, only nineteen percent of "churchgoers" read the Bible on a daily basis. Twenty-five percent testify that they read on their own a few times a week. Fourteen percent report that they read the Bible "once a week," while others (twenty-two percent) confess that they only read the Text "once a month" or a "few times a month" (Rankin).

Yet, statistics indicate that many desire a deeper understanding of the Bible and a more faithful dedication to daily reading. According to research conducted by The Barna Group in 2013, eighty-eight percent of Americans own a Bible and eighty percent of the same population believe that the Bible is sacred literature. What is astounding, though, is that sixty-one percent wish they read the Bible more. When asked about the status of American society, seventy-

seven percent confessed that they believed “the values and morals of America are declining.” What is to blame for this departure from a higher standard of morality? Thirty-two percent blamed the decline of American morals on a “lack of Bible reading” (The Barna Group).

The United States, the religious world as a whole, and especially the Lord’s church need more individuals who are committed to daily Bible study. Instead of the destruction that arises from a lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6; KJV), God’s people should be instructed in the ways of righteousness and rejoice in a thorough understanding of the revealed Word that only comes through dedicated study. Like the “pioneer preachers” and great scholars of years gone by upon whose shoulders faithful Christians now stand, Christians must be encouraged to practice daily Bible study. Perhaps a closer examination of this idea will propel those who desire to read and study the Bible more often to do so.

The Definition Of The Topic

Encouraging daily Bible study should be a priority for elders, deacons, preachers, teachers, mothers, and fathers. Preachers should encourage the members of the congregation with which they labor to feast daily upon the Bread of Life by imbibing His Word (John 6:35; John 6:48; John 6:63). Elders should call for the flock over which they have been given the oversight to avoid a spiritual famine throughout the week by partaking of God’s Word (Acts 20:28). By the same token, fathers and mothers should teach their children to open their own Bibles on a regular basis so as to be given wisdom and direction for their lives.

Encouraging

Barnabas, the “Son of Consolation” (Acts 4:36), was a man who was known for his encouragement. *Encourage*, as it

is translated in the New Testament, means “a calling to one’s aid” (2 Cor. 1:5; Phi. 2:1; 1 The. 2:3). Literally it provides a beautiful picture: to call to one’s side (Vine). The picture provided is of one man placing his arm on the shoulder of another in an attempt to provide comfort and direction. God’s people often find themselves in need of encouragement. The Holy Spirit was sent by Christ to comfort the apostles by revealing the Message of the Gospel unto them (John 16:7-14). Barnabas was a great source of encouragement and comfort to Paul the apostle (Acts 9:26-28). The writer of Hebrews, in turn, encouraged the Christians he taught to encourage one another (Heb. 3:13; Heb. 10:25). The people of God are familiar with giving and receiving encouraging words. What should God’s people be encouraged to do?

Daily

Early in the ministry of Jesus, He taught His disciples to pray for “daily bread” (Mat. 6:11; Luke 11:3). Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul wrote that he “died daily” (1 Cor. 15:31). His daily death was a result of the daily crucifixion prescribed by the Lord to all of His disciples (Luke 9:23; Gal. 2:20). Within the epistle to the Hebrews, God revealed that it was His desire that Christian exhort one another daily (Heb. 3:13). Far from being an occasional obligation, Christianity is a lifetime commitment that requires daily dedication. Much like the early Christians who met daily (Acts 2:46-47), God’s children throughout the ages have been expected to live a life of faithfulness day by day, every day. The encouragement under consideration is to be a regular, daily activity.

Bible

The Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16). It was given unto prophets and penmen by miraculous revelation through the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21). These

writers faithfully recorded the Message that was revealed to them so that men and women who read their words could understand the “mystery of God” that had once been hidden but was revealed to these inspired men (Eph. 3:1-7). The Bible is both the manifestation of the wisdom of God and the will of God. Unlike the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, or the Book of Mormon, the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, is the only volume that is truly “sacred” and will lead men and women to the Father. As Jesus revealed, the Word of God is truth (John 17:17). Unlike the best writings of men, the Word of God is inerrant and completely sufficient for the salvation of man. It is able to save the soul (Jam. 1:21). Since it is of such value and such importance, the Bible is to be approached with seriousness and reverence. A cursory reading of God’s Word will not suffice; something deeper is required.

Study

Study is “the application of the mind to the acquisition of knowledge” (Harper). It is explicitly commanded by the apostle Paul in his writings to Timothy: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). As used in this passage, *study* indicates giving diligence; it is the dedication of one’s mind to a task. Bible study is no different than the study of any other subject; it requires mental toil.

There is no essential difference between the study of the Scriptures and the study of any other subject...An occasional hour or lesson may accomplish something toward learning, but not much. With all the advantages given Timothy through

the early instruction received from his mother and grandmother, and the assistance of the apostle Paul, still it was necessary for him to “study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed: rightly setting forth the word of truth.” So we find in the efforts essential to a knowledge of the word of God, that, like obtaining knowledge of other things, the mind must be employed intently and continuously. There can be no substitute for mental industry. (Dungan 16)

Both Mary at the feet of her Master (Luke 10:38-42) and the disciples of Christ asking for further clarification about the parables of Christ (Mat. 13:36; Mat. 15:15; Mark 4:10; Mark 7:17; Luke 8:9) provide beautiful examples of studious hearts. That same heart should be cultivated within each Christian through a comforting exhortation for a diligent daily study of the revealed Word.

An Exposition Of Acts 17:10-15

While both Mary and the apostles of Christ provide picturesque examples of mental industry employed to understand spiritual truths, the noble Bereans are just as notable in their regular quest for Truth. The second missionary journey of the apostle Paul began when he departed from Antioch in Syria to cross Asia Minor preaching and teaching the Gospel of Christ (Acts 15-18). After passing into Greece, Paul and his companions taught in Philippi where Lydia and a Philippian jailor were converted (Acts 16:14-34). After departing from Philippi, Paul passed through

Amhipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). There he preached in a synagogue of the Jews for three sabbath days, yet his efforts were met with limited success.

While many of the devout Greeks and the chief women gladly received the Word of God (Acts 17:4), the remainder of the Jews who were not converted caused an uproar to be raised against Paul and his recent converts. Even the rulers of the city were troubled (Acts 17:5-8). Because of the tumultuous events among the people, the church sent Paul and Silas fifty miles southwest to Berea, a city situated at the foot of Mount Bermius. Berea was known for its productive apple, peach, and pear orchards; nevertheless, the Bereans have left an indelible mark upon God's people because of their fruitfulness spiritually.

The Berean Distinction (Acts 17:11a)

Upon entering into Berea, the apostle Paul went into the synagogue of the Jews, as was his custom to do (Acts 17:10). The inspired historian, Luke, compares the Jews that Paul met in Berea with those that he met in Thessalonica by writing, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica" (Acts 17:11). *These* refers to the Berean Jews (Acts 17:10), while *those* calls the Thessalonian Jews to mind (Acts 17:1). The Bereans won for themselves a grand distinction from the Thessalonians, for they were more noble. Their nobility indicates that they were of a "higher rank" or of a better disposition. While they may not have been "noble" by the world's standards (1 Cor. 1:26), these Jews received high praise from the Spirit of God. Why were they considered "more noble"? What helped them to achieve this favorable distinction when compared to their Thessalonian brethren? Namely this: the Bereans were men and women of dedication.

The Berean Dedication (Acts 17:11b)

The baser mindset of the Jews at Thessalonica is readily seen because of their swift rejection of the Gospel. Within three weeks of Paul's arrival, the Jews had already caused riots and uproars within the city. Such was not the case with the Bereans. "They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11.) The distinction of nobility was theirs because of their reaction to the preaching of the Gospel.

This reaction was twofold. First, Luke cites their reception as the chief reason for their commendation. They "received the word with all readiness of mind." When the Word of God was preached by Paul at Berea (Acts 17:13), the Jews in the synagogue readily received his words. They listened attentively as Paul explained, like he had at Thessalonica, about the suffering of Christ and His resurrection (Acts 17:3). Their reception was characterized by a "readiness of mind." The type of readiness they exhibited indicates a passionate zeal. The Bereans were enthusiastic in their approach to the public preaching of the Christ.

Second, the inspired writer references their research as another reason behind their nobility. Not only were the Bereans eager to hear the message proclaimed, they were just as eager to investigate the truth of these claims themselves. The Bible says, they "searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so." The validity and truth of the message that Paul preached was discovered by a careful examination of the Word of God. Every time the phrase *the scriptures* is used in the New Testament, it is in reference to the revealed and written Word of God (Mat. 22:29; Mark 12:24; Luke 24:32; Luke 24:45; John 5:39; Acts 17:11; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). For the First Century Bereans, "the Scriptures" would

encompass the entirety of the Old Testament; for 21st century Christians, the completed New Testament would be under consideration as well. Their careful investigation or examination of the Scriptures was a daily activity. A habitual sifting of God's Word revealed the Scriptural truth of Paul's message.

The Berean Designation (Acts 17:12-14)

Because the Bereans' dedication had won for them a distinction from the Jews of Thessalonica they were given a particular designation. Luke writes:

Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. (Acts 17:12-14)

Not only were the Jewish Bereans receptive to the Gospel, but honorable women and men who were Greeks heard and accepted the same. Because of their reception, which was based upon their own research, these individuals believed on Christ. When Luke refers to them collectively he calls them "the brethren" (Acts 17:14). The believing Bereans were designated as Christians, members of the body of Christ, His church. They heard the preaching of Paul, received the Message which he taught, examined his sermons in light of Scripture each day, and submitted to the Message which they believed as a result. Because of their

obedient faith, they were Divinely called “brethren” by the Holy Spirit. Daily Bible study had led them to the salvation of their souls.

The Application Of The Truth

While the Bereans provide a timeless example of daily Bible study, it is of great importance for Christians of every generations to be encouraged to do the same. If nearly two-thirds of Americans wish that they read the Bible more often, then why are they not? What is hindering thousands of people from practicing something that the Bereans did regularly? A closer examination of the account in Acts of the Berean brethren provides four encouraging truths and recommendations that will assist members of the body of Christ in developing a period of daily Bible study.

Daily Bible Study Requires A Readiness

First, Luke wrote of the Bereans that they received the Word with “all readiness of mind” (Acts 17:11). Their great passion for hearing the Message motivated them to a further investigation of the preaching of Paul. Like an infant craving his mother’s milk (1 Pet. 2:2), the Bereans craved the Word of God. They possessed open hearts and, therefore, open Bibles. In order to cultivate the practice of daily Bible study and to encourage others to do so, it is of the utmost importance that God’s people desire God’s Word with all readiness of mind. If the mind is not prepared through passion, then it is likely that daily Bible study will simply be a task and not a treasure.

Daily Bible Study Requires A Routine

Second, the regular routine of the Bereans contributed to their dedication to daily Bible study. Their association with God’s revealed Word was habitual. Much like Jesus’s customary attendance to the assemblies of the synagogue (Luke 4:16) and Paul’s dedication to first enter into the

synagogue to preach in whatever city he was (Acts 17:2), the Bereans had the custom of studying the Text daily. Brother Robert R. Taylor, Jr. believes in the value of habitual Bible study.

Develop a profitable study habit, make it a regular (daily) priority and make it personal. Use study helps, including the computer if desired, to enhance the study rather than using it as a base of knowledge resource. Only by personal ingestion can one store Biblical knowledge in the mind where it is available on any given occasion. (177)

If Bible study is haphazard and sporadic, then it is not likely that anyone will continue seriously for any given length of time. Like the daily death (1 Cor. 15:31) and the daily cross (Luke 9:23), the household of God should be devoted to a daily Bible study routine.

Daily Bible Study Requires A Reason

Third, the Bereans approached daily Bible study with a purpose. They investigated the claims of the apostle Paul in light of Scripture to see “whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). Their reason for daily Bible study was to prove the truth or error contained in the preaching of Paul. Many approach Bible study simply as an obligation as a child of God. Others only attempt to participate in regular Bible reading or study because they feel guilty if they do not. Why is it important for each individual Christian to be encouraged to study their Bible daily? Daily Bible study should be encouraged because the spiritual growth that is attained thereby strengthens the individual, supports the church, and brings glory to God. Those who attempt to cultivate a routine

of daily Bible study will fail if they do not know why they are doing so.

Daily Bible Study Reaps Reward

Fourth, the Bereans were rewarded for the faithfulness to daily Bible study. When they discovered the truth of Paul's preaching, they believed the message concerning Christ (Acts 17:12). Their habitual study earned them the distinction of being "more noble than those in Thessalonica" (Acts 17:11). The Bereans were initially saved because of their diligence and were immortalized in Scripture because of their godly example. God blesses those who have a desire to seek, know, and understand His Will. Daily Bible study enriches the life and equips the child of God for the challenges that all men face. An honest investigation of God's Word leads to salvation from sin and an understanding of the truth (John 8:31-32).

Conclusion

Encouraging daily Bible study should be a priority for every eldership in every congregation. It should be a priority in the private lives of preachers and parents throughout the brotherhood. A deeper dedication to personal study will build stronger congregations, will equip better preachers, will train wiser parents, and will rear faithful children. Like the Bereans of old who were blessed with a noble distinction because of their dedication to regular Bible study and were designated as brethren because of their obedience to the Truth, God's people in every generation would increase in nobility as they increased in study. A readiness of mind, a daily routine, a reason for the task, and a remembrance of the rewards that follow will greatly encourage the church to practice this much needed discipline. May God's people the world over be able to say, "O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psa. 119:97).

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CHAPTER 7

Then Barnabas Departed...To Seek Saul: The Encouragement That Comes From Teaming Up For The Lord

Jason Chesser

No sooner had God created Adam and Eve, than He made them a team. God literally joined them together (Matthew 19:6; NKJV). No sooner had Jesus embarked upon His public ministry, than He began the process of building a team (His disciples). When asked what they will miss most, many retiring athletes respond, “My teammates.” Few things are more rewarding and enjoyable than being part of a successful team. Effective teamwork is essential to success in virtually every aspect of life, and the church of our Lord is no exception.

Let us observe the methodical, masterfully planned process Jesus used to construct His team of apostles. Our Lord began by observing potential team members. “Before Philip called you,” Jesus told Nathanael (Bartholomew), “when you were under the fig tree, I saw you” (John 1:48). Jesus then quickly moved to the training phase of team-building. Jesus said to Peter and Andrew, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Mat. 4:19). After a period of observation and training, Jesus spent an entire evening in prayer (Luke

6:12) before calling His disciples, and from them choosing twelve to be His team of apostles. “He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14). But Jesus never sent them out alone; He sent them out “two by two” (Mark 6:7). “Two are better than one,” said the inspired Preacher of old, “because they have a good reward for their labor” (Ecc. 4:9).

It is reasonable to imagine that the above passage was in the mind of Barnabas when he departed for Tarsus to seek Saul (Acts 11:25). After arriving at Antioch and being an eyewitness to the grace of the Lord at work there, can you not imagine a joyful Barnabas exclaiming, “This is a job that calls for teamwork!”? Brethren, in every spiritual endeavor, through both word and deed, our Savior is demanding this same response: This is a job that calls for teamwork! The Lord expects His people to be good stewards of their time and resources; this cannot be accomplished without a spirit of unity. In order to be a well-functioning team of believers, we need to be on the same page and singing from the same sheet of music. Let us observe some ways by which we can make teamwork in the Lord’s church possible.

Drop The Excuses!

An unfortunate characteristic possessed by many human beings is a knee-jerk tendency to make excuses to justify or explain away failures. You are far more likely to hear an outfielder complain about the sun being in his eyes rather than a confession of misjudgment after missing a fly ball. Adam blamed his sin on his wife: “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate” (Gen. 3:12). Eve blamed her sin on the serpent: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Gen. 3:13). If the serpent had been allowed an opportunity to speak in the Lord’s presence, he

probably would have found something or someone to blame as well.

Regrettably, brethren often make excuses to explain away or justify failures in inter- and intra-congregational cooperation. Oftentimes, these failures in cooperation are not due to matters involving doctrine, but are for reasons involving personality, pride, and stubbornness. How many struggling congregations in our brotherhood exist only a few, short miles from another congregation in a similar state of decline? Both congregations spend precious contribution dollars maintaining buildings and grounds that are filled to a quarter of capacity each Lord's Day. They heat and cool classrooms that are no longer used, pay insurance on church vans that are under-driven and lament their inability to support faithful mission works financially. When the idea of a merger of the two is broached, a litany of illegitimate excuses is given. Brother Smith's late wife is buried in Church A's cemetery and the only way he is leaving is if he is being laid to rest there also. Sister Jones' family has been attending Church B for three generations and she has no plans to break tradition. Brother and Sister Johnson, lifetime members of Church A, would have to drive an extra five miles in order to attend Church B, and that would just be too much of a strain for them at their age. Brother Wright of Church A does not get along with Brother Wrong at Church B and a merger just would not work. The list could go on *ad nauseam*, but the picture is clear.

A Tax Collector and a Zealot

An investigation into the team of apostles built by our Savior quickly reveals that whatever non-doctrinal excuses we may give for failures in cooperation are unjustifiable. In Matthew's list of the apostles in chapter ten, very little information other than names and family relations is given.

Only one occupation is provided: Matthew, the tax collector. And only one descriptive term, or appositive, is included: Simon the Cananite (or Zealot). Why were these two pieces of information specified in Matthew's list of the apostles? The Holy Spirit did not instruct Matthew to include his occupation in this list because it was superior to the others—quite the opposite. The Holy Spirit did not choose to highlight Simon's affiliation with the Zealots because He thought it was an organization worthy of special recognition. What point, therefore, is the Holy Spirit making? Let us observe the implication of putting a tax collector and a zealot on the same team.

“And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census took place while Quirinius was governing Syria” (Luke 2:1-2). Many Jews resented this required registry and especially hated the excessive taxes levied upon them by the Roman Empire. An opposition group arose among the Jews, built upon the tenet that paying tribute to Rome was unlawful. The Zealots refused to pay taxes to Rome and even killed government officials. They became notorious for terroristic acts of violence, even against their own countrymen. “He (Simon) was a member of that party of patriotic Jews, who so zealously opposed the Roman rule in Palestine and fanatically resorted to violence in their hatred of the foreign yoke” (Tenney 441). “It is not improbable that the assassins of Acts 21:38 were identical, or at least closely associated, with the body of the Zealots” (Heidel). Josephus records that the Zealots “fell upon the people as upon a flock of profane animals, and cut their throats” (*Wars*, Book IV, Chapter V). “In this lawlessness the so-called Zealots excelled, a class which justified their name by their actions; for they copied every evil deed, nor was there any villainy recorded in history

that they failed to emulate zealously” (Josephus, Wars 7). So, Simon, chosen by Jesus to be an apostle, in all likelihood, was a terrorizing, tax-hating nationalist.

So, who would a tax-hating Zealot dislike more than anyone else in the world? That is right—a tax collector. Jewish tax collectors were reviled by their own people and especially by the Zealots. In fact, the Jews viewed a tax collector as no better than a thief or a prostitute. That is why Jesus’ words in Matthew 21:31 were especially cutting to the chief priests and elders to whom He was speaking: “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.” That is also why the scribes and Pharisees were shocked that Jesus would eat in Matthew’s house, asking His disciples, “How is that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?” (Mark 2:16). Jesus again illuminates the disdain the Jews felt for tax collectors in His parable recorded in Luke 17. “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector’” (Luke 18:11). Notice the way in which the self-righteous Pharisee references the Publican. It is as if the prideful Jewish leader is labeling the tax collector as the worst of the lot.

Is it not amazing, therefore, that Jesus would select a Zealot and a tax collector to be part of the most important team ever assembled? Not only did our Lord make them teammates, He commanded them to love one another (John 13:35). He prayed that “they may be one as We are” (John 17:11). Jesus could not have picked a more unlikely duo to be a part of a loving, unified team that would “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). What is Jesus trying to teach through Simon and Matthew? If Jesus can train them to work together, and even love another, what excuse do we have for not doing the

same? What justifiable excuse for non-cooperation holds water in light of this Biblical example? Simon and Matthew are telling Brother Wright and Brother Wrong that they need to put aside their petty differences and disagreements and start working together and loving one another. If brethren cannot work together and love one another on earth, can they genuinely expect a free pass from the ultimate team-builder and unifier, Jesus Christ?

Saul and the Hellenists

Barnabas got the point. Barnabas understood Jesus' teaching on love and unity, even at a time when the rest of the disciples did not. After Saul's conversion, he tried to join the disciples in Jerusalem, but they were, understandably, all afraid of him and did not believe that he was a disciple (Acts 9:26). Earlier, Ananias was hesitant to go to Saul even after Jesus instructed him to do so in a vision (Acts 9:13-14). It was Barnabas who brought Saul to the apostles and courageously vouched for him. It was Barnabas who declared to the apostles how Saul was a genuine convert and needed to be accepted and utilized.

Interestingly, in his description of Saul, Barnabas told the apostles how he disputed against the Hellenists, and they tried to kill Saul (Acts 9:29). In Acts 11, some of the disciples that scattered during the persecution that arose after Stephen's stoning encountered some Hellenists, preached the Lord Jesus, and turned many of them to the Lord (Acts 11:20-21). When the good news came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas on a mission trip to Antioch (Acts 11:22). Barnabas saw the grace of God at work among the new disciples at Antioch and encouraged them to continue with the Lord (Acts 11:23). It is in this context that we find the theme passage for this lesson: "Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul" (Acts 11:25).

Barnabas followed the Savior's "Zealot/Tax Collector" method for team building to perfection. Barnabas finds a group of believing Hellenists and chooses the unlikeliest (humanly speaking) of candidates as his helper in teaching and encouraging them: a man that had once disputed against the Hellenists to the extent that they tried to kill him! One that did not understand Jesus' method of team building never would have dreamed of bringing these two opposing forces together. If Barnabas had told anyone of his plans before departing for Tarsus, they surely would have tried to dissuade Barnabas from going. "That is a recipe for disaster!" Barnabas would have been warned.

Did Barnabas' plan work? He was following Jesus' model, so of course it did. "And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). The Lord can bring together a tax collector and a zealot, and Saul and the Hellenists and have them not only working together, but loving one another. When we decide to follow Jesus' model for team building and cooperation, only good can result.

What reasonable excuse for non-cooperation can Brothers Wright and Wrong present to The Almighty in light of Simon and Matthew, and Saul and the Hellenists? Brethren, we need to drop any excuse and remove any obstacle that hinders us from working together to achieve fully the goals that the Lord has set before us. Sometimes, security breaches occur in this country due to a lack of communication and partnership among the various law enforcement agencies. Sometimes, investigations are hindered due to jealousies and disputes among agencies that are supposed to work together. May these types of problems not exist among

members of the Lord's Kingdom. As tragic as a botched criminal investigation may be, wasted opportunities to advance the Lord's church and spread the gospel message due to failures of cooperation are more so. Jesus wants no excuses, so let us not give Him any!

Hide The Pride

Now that we have removed excuse-making as a hindrance to teamwork in the Lord's church, let us move to another barrier—pride. Recently, I heard a radio host promoting a weekend event that his program was helping to sponsor. There were a large number of denominational churches in the area that were participating in the event as well. In light of that fact, the radio host said, "What is amazing is that so many different churches are participating in an event that none of them is getting the credit for." I wish that type of statement would only be applicable to the denominational community, but problems associated with pride exist among churches of Christ as well. There are churches in the brotherhood that have the reputation of enthusiastically supporting a work or project only if they are the ones that came up with the idea. Brethren, these things ought not so to be.

Pride helped lure Eve to the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, and pride has been wreaking havoc among mankind ever since. In Proverbs 6:16-19, seven things the Lord hates are listed. At the top of the list is "a proud look." The Lord resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (Jam. 4:6). Some of the most dramatic and severe manifestations of God's judgment and wrath recorded in the Bible were in response to man's pride. God opened the mouth of the earth and swallowed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their families after their pride fueled a rebellion against Moses (Num. 16). Nebuchadnezzar made the grievous mistake of

crediting his power and majesty as the sources of Babylon's greatness (Dan. 4:30). While the words were still leaving his lips, God's judgment came upon him and he was driven from the presence of men into the field where he ate grass like oxen and grew hair like eagle's feathers and nails like bird claws (Dan. 4:33).

King Herod made a tragic error when he allowed the people of Tyre and Sidon to give him glory and praise that was due only to God. As the people shouted, "The voice of a god and not of a man," an angel of the Lord struck him, and he was eaten by worms and died (Acts 12:20-23). These examples, and many others, serve as a powerful lesson for us today as we seek to please the Lord. "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

Pride is a Cooperation Killer

Pride is one of the three foundational sins (1 John 2:16). It is especially dangerous because it feeds so many other sins and shortcomings. Pride robs us of honor (Pro. 15:33). Pride prohibits us from being able to dwell with God (Isa. 57:15). Pride keeps us from the precious gift of justification (Luke 18:13-14). And pride prevents us from inheriting the Kingdom of God (Mat. 5:3). Regarding the "poor in spirit" mentioned by Jesus in the beatitudes, H. Leo Boles says that it means those who are "destitute of the poor, haughty, arrogant spirit of the world" (Boles 120).

There are many ways in which the sin of pride hinders cooperation among brethren. Some brethren choose not to attend or support works or events at neighboring congregations because "they never come to ours!" Some brethren choose to involve themselves only in works or events that provide a personal or home-congregational

benefit. Some preachers decide to avoid certain area events or programs due to personality conflicts with the preacher at the sponsoring congregation. The list of failures in cooperation could continue, and various reasons could be offered; but an honest investigation would find pride as the culprit in many cases. Surely, Diotrephes would have provided various reasons for his sinful behavior recorded in 3 John 9-10; but, the real reason was that he “loved to have the preeminence among them.”

Do not Preach Unity and Practice Division

Barnabas was a great man. In fact, Barnabas is one of the most admirable characters recorded in the New Testament. He was a unifier, an encourager, a go-getter, and a diligent worker. He embraced Saul when nobody else would, and he went wherever he was needed. “He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:24). But like the rest of us, he was not perfect.

In Galatians 2, we learn that Paul and Barnabas were given the right hand of fellowship and were sent by Peter, James, and John to be missionaries to the Gentiles. Sometime later, Peter came to Antioch to check on the work and meet the Gentile brethren. Peter had no problem fellowshiping the Gentiles until “those who were of the circumcision” arrived on the scene (Gal. 2:12). Peter feared them and withdrew himself from the Gentiles, a hypocritical act for which Paul “withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed” (Gal. 2:11). In describing this event to the Galatians, Paul wrote, “And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy” (Gal. 2:13). One can almost feel the shock and surprise in Paul’s words as he says, “Even Barnabas.” This was so out of character for Barnabas. He had been with the

Gentile brethren in Antioch almost since the beginning. He was hand-picked by the apostles in Jerusalem to go there upon news of their belief. He is the one who encouraged them all that “with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord” (Acts 11:23). Yet, here Barnabas is, withdrawing himself from those dear, Gentile brethren, and participating in the divisive behavior of Peter and those prejudicial Jews.

The Lord’s church has no place for those who preach love, but practice hate, who quote John 17:21, but practice I Corinthians 1:11. Again, we are not referring to matters of doctrine. There can be no working together or “agreeing to get along” when foundational and fundamental principles are at stake. However, many lapses in unity, harmony, and cooperation exist for reasons other than legitimate, doctrinal concerns. Too many problems today mimic the shortcomings found in Corinth, Antioch, Philippi (Euodia/Syntyche), and Jerusalem (Hellenist widows). The Holy Spirit recorded these specific faults with these congregations for a purpose. God wants His people to learn from these mistakes and avoid the patterns of destruction and division. Within the framework of this point is another essential ingredient for true unity within members of the Lord’s church and between congregations of His people.

Be Color Blind

It has been said that the most racially segregated hour of the week is the worship hour on Sunday. In the previous section, we examined Barnabas’ departure from his usual roles as unifier and encourager. What was the root cause of this lapse in behavior? What was this evil wind in which Barnabas was carried away? Did not this evil wind blow in from the treacherous shores of prejudice? Peter withdrew himself from the Gentiles due to fear of Jews that had

obviously not yet grown to accept into the church those who were uncircumcised. But it was not just that they were uncircumcised, as far as these Jews were concerned. Their problems with the Gentiles were much deeper and older than that.

Jewish prejudice is displayed throughout the pages of Scripture. For example, in Acts 10:28, Peter said to Cornelius and his household, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation.” Was it unlawful because it was a violation of God’s law or because it was a violation of man-made commandments that were vainly taught as doctrine (Mat. 15:9). Jesus subjected Himself to Mosaic Law during the course of His earthly ministry. However, in Matthew 8:5-8, Jesus was willing to go to the house of a centurion and heal his sick servant. Also, Jesus had no problem “keeping company with” the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. Why did Jesus say to the Gentile woman from Canaan, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs”? (Mat. 15:26). In part, Jesus was exposing the general Jewish attitude toward Gentiles, an attitude that had existed for centuries. That is why God used the multiple occurrences of an extraordinary vision to impress upon Peter’s mind what the proper attitude toward Gentiles should be (Acts 10:9-16). That is why the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his household in the presence of “those of the circumcision” (Acts 10: 44-45). Anything less would have, in all likelihood, been met with the same contention as that expressed by those in Judea after hearing about the Gentiles receiving the word (Acts 11: 1-2).

Of course, Jews do not own a monopoly on the sinful attitude of prejudice. Deplorable stories can be told of brethren who manifested this attitude within congregations in this country. Black brethren, still alive today, can sorrowfully

relate experiences of being turned away at the door of an all-white church. Though tremendous improvement has taken place regarding race relations in this country and in the church, racial segregation is still prevalent among many congregations of the Lord's people. It is more than unfortunate that predominantly white and predominantly black congregations remain the *status quo* in many towns across the United States. Today, the racial division among brethren may not exist primarily due to prejudice, but the consequences are the same.

“We are all Green”

Eric Owens presented an outstanding lesson at *Polishing the Pulpit*, 2012, with the above title. In his lesson, Eric beseeched the brotherhood to put away any attitudes and behaviors that divide rather than unite God's children. Brother Owens used an illustration from his time in the Marine Corp to illustrate the point. While participating in a rigorous training exercise, Eric fell into the back of the trainee in front of him. His fellow Marine responded with a statement that included a racial slur. Eric confessed that he did not respond the way he should, and the incident quickly escalated. Other members of the platoon became involved, and the situation was about to deteriorate into a full-scale race riot until the commanding officer got involved. In his rebuke, the officer said, “In the Marine Corp, we are not white; we are not black, we are all green.” He went on to remind them that no military group could function properly unless its members are unified in mission, spirit, and purpose. In like manner, no church can function in a way that is pleasing to God unless its members are knit together in love (Eph. 4:16). One body part cannot say to another, “I have no need of you” (1 Cor. 12:21) because “there should be no schism in the body” (1 Cor. 12:25).

Conclusion

Christians share a common Master, message, mission, and manual. There is no reason why members of Christ's kingdom should not be the most unified, loving, and cooperative entity on the face of the earth. The only things hindering us are the worldly attitudes and behaviors that we allow to creep into our Savior's divine, blood-bought institution. Indeed, there is no limit to the good that can be accomplished if we will only drop the excuses, hide the pride, preach and practice unity, and be color blind.

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CHAPTER 8

No Small Dissension and Disputation: Encouraging Brethren To Stand Up For Sound Doctrine

Gary Colley

It is always a joy to be associated with the elders and members of the Southaven church of Christ. It is also a pleasure to have a part in the great POWER lectureship and to have fellowship in the Gospel with the director, Wade Webster. The past themes of these lectureship programs have been challenging to the thoughtful seeker for Truth, and this year's study is no different. We commend the perusal of this book to every sincere seeker of God's Word.

In The First Century

The church for which Jesus shed His blood on the cross, the church of Christ (Rom. 16:16; KJV), has since the day of Pentecost had peaceful times, but also times of dissension and disputation. On the birthday of the church in Jerusalem, when souls were being added by the thousands, Luke records that the church was "praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). What a memorable and wonderful time was enjoyed by these saved ones when peace

and soundness in doctrine were paramount in the minds of members of the church. There had not come at this time the apostate Catholic Church, the beginning of which is so often times referred to in the Scriptures as the “falling away” (Acts 20:28-30; 2 The. 2:1-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-5). There were not any “denominations” where diversity was praised and division was honored. These did not appear in the world for some fifteen hundred years after the church of Christ was established on Pentecost (Acts 2). The only references to denominations in the Scriptures are those of condemnation. When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, he said,

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name (or authority GC) of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, **and that there be no divisions among you**; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul’ and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:10-13)

Following Sound Doctrine

Sound doctrine simply means healthy teaching. When all decide to follow the same Word of God, with good and honest hearts, the peace and unity of the first-century church will

be again enjoyed. The divine record states that on Pentecost Peter, “standing up with the eleven” preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, the result being, “Then they that gladly received the word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers” (Acts 2:41-42). The same harmony can be enjoyed by Christians today if they will remain with conviction in the apostles doctrine, have fellowship in singing praises to God, give as we are prospered, meet each Lord’s Day around the table of the Lord for the Lord’s Supper, and pray the prayer of righteousness (Jam. 5:16). Paul wrote to the young preacher Timothy that he should “continue in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:14-15). He writes further, “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Paul proclaimed salvation upon Timothy’s faithfulness in preaching the Word and the receptive obedience of those who heard (1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:1-8).

Contentions In The Early Church

Sadly, the Bible and the church have always had one relentless enemy attempting to destroy them both! That enemy is the Devil. Peter warned of his work, and the dividing influence in the minds of his human helpers, saying, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the

same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Pet. 5:8-9). One of the contentions in the early church came when the false teaching by the Judaizing teachers troubled its members. They were not content to acknowledge that the Old Law of Moses had been nailed to the cross and therefore no man should be judged for not keeping that law. Paul wrote,

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. (Col. 2:14-19)

No one was subject to the Law of Moses after the death of Christ on the cross and the coming of the day of Pentecost when the church of Christ was fully established (John 1:17). Nor should any be judged for not abiding in the

rites, ceremonies, and teaching of the Law of Moses under the Christian Dispensation. While it is true that nine of the Ten Commandments given to Moses are repeated in the New Testament (all except “Remember the Sabbath”), it is obedience to the New and not the Old Law that is necessary. All were to continue in the New Covenant which Jesus sealed with His blood offered on the cross (Mat. 26:28). However, no small dissension and disputation arose from among the Judaizing teachers. Acts 15:1 declares, “And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” The malignity of these Jews is hard to understand! They were persecutors of Paul where ever he went, often times traveling many miles to where he was preaching the Gospel. They stoned him at Lystra, dragged him outside the gates of the city thinking he was dead. They often plotted to kill him, but he would learn of their plots and escape from their dastardly plan . They were especially troubled because Paul had “opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). They considered him a traitor of their religion.

Barnabas Seeks Paul.

The good man Barnabas, called the exhorter, had been sent from Jerusalem to Antioch to assist in the work. He “exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23). Saul had returned to Tarsus from Jerusalem, and after about eight years of being there, the record says,

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek for Saul [later Paul, GC]: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole

year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. (Acts 11:25-26)

Saul's great ability, his love for the Lord and His cause, as well as his knowledge in the Greek language, made him a very suitable helper in that great city containing so many nationalities of people. No doubt their work for a year in Antioch would lay a foundation that would remain for years in protecting the church and the surrounding area from apostasy. This would suggest to us that missionaries need to stay longer than "a few weeks" in order to ground further the Christians. This began a very close relationship between Paul and Barnabas, and they also made missionary trips together. Until this time, there had been peace in the church at Antioch and a great number were converted. Peace and unity of the brethren in Christ always brings growth. Please note also that the new name that would be given by God to His people, as was prophesied by Isaiah (Isa.62:2), and the name which Paul was to "bear before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15), was given after the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius was converted (Acts 10), and the kings had seen the righteousness of God.

Also note that Paul was in Antioch before and when the name was given. That new name was *Christian*, literally meaning "of Christ," and broadly indicating one who is obedient to Christ, a follower of His, a member of the church of Christ. The three times it is mentioned in the New Testament are found in Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; and 1 Pet. 4:16.

Peace Disturbed

It has been about sixteen years since the church of Christ was established in Jerusalem on the notable day

of Pentecost (Acts 2). The great commission had been given which authorized the Gospel to be preached to “all nations” and to “every creature” (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16).

Much good had been accomplished in the conversion of the Jews to whom the Gospel was first to be preached (Rom. 1:16). As noted before, Cornelius, a Gentile, had also now been converted, as well as many other Gentiles to whom Paul preached the Gospel. The church established in Colosse was made up mainly of Gentiles. Paul, who was the special apostle to the Gentiles, wrote a letter to them in which he stated, “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister” (Col. 1:23). This was to the Jews a disturbing happening and caused them to bring the false claims of the need for Christians, especially Gentiles, to be circumcised for salvation. It should be remembered that for 1500 years the Jews had been under the power of the Law of Moses. We suppose that their hesitation in surrendering their law for the Gospel is no surprise when these facts are considered. That Gentiles were now subject to the Gospel and could be saved, they now had to acknowledge. But, they wanted them to be adopted Jews in principle. With so many coming into the church, it seems that they were afraid that the Gentile element would soon become strong enough to dominate the whole body of believers. They, therefore, made extreme demands so as to possibly prevent their prevalence.

God in His providence prevented the success of the Jewish element destroying one of the basic truths of the Gospel, that all nations should be brought into the church by the same plan of salvation.

Circumcision And The Law.

The demands of the Jewish Christians had become a challenging and disturbing question in the church. The Pharisaic party of the Jewish brethren were carrying it to Gentile congregations in every territory. They were forcing the question and demanding it was necessary for the salvation of the Gentiles. The problem ballooned into such proportions that it had to be settled once and for all. Actually circumcision had begun in the time of Abraham which was long before the giving of the Sinai Law. The removal of the Law of Moses at the cross, they thought, would not affect the national right of the Jews to practice circumcision. It was acceptable for them to practice circumcision in this way after becoming Christians, but making it a necessary act of obedience for salvation, even for the Jew was wrong. Paul makes this clear after the settlement in Acts 15, when he states,

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh

by love. Ye did run well; who did hinder
you that ye should not obey the truth?
(Gal 5:1-7)

Circumcision is a matter of judgment and not command. Many are mistaken in saying today that circumcision is a type of baptism, and that baptism is the antitype. But if this theory is true, it would exclude all females! All mankind is subject to baptism to come into Christ. Circumcision is of no consequence in being a Christian! In Christ Jesus, both Jew and Gentile came into the one body, the church, in the same way (Gal. 3:26-28). They were

built upon the foundation of the apostles
and prophets (their teaching GC), Jesus
Christ himself being the chief corner
stone; in whom all the building fitly
framed together groweth unto an holy
temple in the Lord: In whom ye also
are builded together for an habitation of
God through the Spirit. (Eph. 2:20-21)

Therefore the Jew could not require the Gentile to be circumcised and to keep the Law of Moses as an add-on or adjunct to the Gospel. The Gospel was not and is not just an extension of the Jewish religion (Mat. 5:19-20).

“No Small Dissension”

It is evident that the ones who were causing the trouble in the church were Jews who had become Christians (Gal. 2:4). Paul and Barnabas, both being from Gentile countries and having just returned from successful journeys among the Gentiles, were certainly the ones to attack this problem.

Evidently they strongly contended with the Judaizing teachers and were involved in trying to teach them for some time. However these Jews did not accept Paul's claim to being an apostle equal with those apostles in Jerusalem. Paul's authority was not behind any of the other apostles in apostolic authority and should have been accepted as final on the question (2 Cor. 11:5)! But like it or not, Paul would be the leading agent in taking care of the problem.

This brings us to the question, How should we settle controversies in the church today? The way is established by the early church and is the best method of returning peace and harmony to any congregation. Let us go to the apostles for our answer! They are the ambassadors who have the authority of King Jesus and who have brought us the Word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:20).

Paul might have objected to the suggestion that men be sent to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, since it would in some way seem to challenge his apostleship. However, he did not insist on having his own way or thinking but endorsed their suggestion, and a meeting was set to go to Jerusalem for the question to be settled. He did not consult flesh and blood after his conversion nor did he doubt that his apostolic authority was from the Lord Himself (Gal.1:11-19). But since this would affect the whole church for all time, it was doubtless wise to obtain the most satisfactory results, and he agreed with the decision of the brethren.

The Case Presented

The brethren in Jerusalem received them warmly (Acts 15:4). It is a touching and inspiring scene when we see the friendly and loving way of hospitality as is shown by the church. Saul and Barnabas had passed through Phenicia and Samaria telling of the conversion of the Gentiles which caused great joy. In Jerusalem, Paul called together some of

the more prominent ones in a private meeting (Gal. 2:2). But objections were forth coming from “the sect of the Pharisees which believed” saying that the Gentiles must be circumcised (Acts 15:5).

In the general meeting with the apostles and elders and with the whole church, Peter told of the conversion of Cornelius, Paul and Barnabas repeated their account of Gentile conversions, and the apostle James gave his decision (Acts 15:6ff). They then selected personal messengers to return with Paul and Barnabas to confirm the letter they proposed and sent. “Judas called Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren were chosen. They were of such character so as to make the letter acceptable to all under the circumstances. Of course public discussion before the whole church did not effect the agreement between the inspired apostles. Hence in these vital matters concerning salvation they would not disagree. Any other view would have denied the claim of the apostles to inspiration. All were brought into agreement except the Judaizing false teachers who had caused the disturbance. “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us” (Acts 15:28), and hence the matter was settled. As the inspiration of the apostles stood firm, this means that the letter came from the Holy Spirit.

The Letter Is Sent

With the approval of all, the letter was addressed to the Gentile brethren in Antioch and throughout Syria and Cilicia. This would be the territory most affected by the Judaizing teachers, and therefore the place to which the letter would first appear. However, it was a general letter to the church and would be needed wherever Jews and Gentiles made up the membership. It was of universal importance as a divine prohibition against all uninspired efforts to mingle parts of the Law of Moses with the Gospel of Christ. Paul

later informed all that if any attempted to press these matters they were “fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4).

There have been many in later times who have caused trouble in the churches because they have brought in things not authorized in the Scriptures (1 Cor. 4:6). These at times appeal to the Old Law for their “authority” but we are not under that Law today (Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 9-11). The ones using incense, or mechanical music in addition to singing in worship, or who sprinkle babies, or observe the seventh-day Sabbath are guilty and condemned by the same principle with which the apostles condemned the Judaizing teachers (Rev. 22:18-19). We certainly believe in the Old Testament for our “learning” and “comfort” (Rom. 15:4), but not for our law today under the Christian dispensation. Christians now are to speak “sound doctrine” or the pure unadulterated Gospel of Christ (Tit. 2:1).

The Plan Of Salvation

The plan of salvation has been made in the mind of God, executed by Christ on the cross of Calvary, and revealed by the Holy Spirit, Who took the words of Jesus to declare God’s mind about salvation (John 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:9-11). The plan includes hearing the Gospel (John 6:44-45), believing the facts of the Gospel with all the heart (John 8:21; John 8:24), repenting of all past sins by changing our will (Luke 13:3; Luke 13:5), confessing the name of Christ before men (Mat. 10:32-33), and being immersed in water for the remission of our sins (Mat.28:18-20; Acts 2:38; Acts 2:41; Acts 2:47). No part of these necessary items can be ignored and still give to lost man his salvation. These are the things which must be taught to all nations, but circumcision is not included. Therefore this is all the burden of teaching that Christians need to carry to the world. Even with these steps of obedience being done, it is still the grace of God that saves us (Tit. 2:11-

12). The Law of Moses was a yoke of bondage which even the Jews were not able to bear (Acts 15:10). It was removed by Jesus when He died on the cross (Heb. 10:9-10). The Gentiles were not required to wear that yoke, neither then or now!

Contents Of The Letter

The brethren in Jerusalem wrote a letter containing their decision. Several things are mentioned in the letter that needed the attention of the brethren: idolatry, blood, things strangled, and fornication. All of these were to be remembered as sinful, but in actuality were known to be sinful **before** the giving of the Mosaic Law. Blood as food and things strangled were forbidden in Noah's time (Gen. 9:4). The abrogation of the Law of Moses did not affect the necessity of observing these commands. These sins were and are forbidden under all covenants made by God.

When the letter was delivered and read, the effects on the church were very favorable. Paul and Barnabas, with Judas and Silas, came to Antioch where they called the multitude together and delivered the letter. It caused great rejoicing when it was read, because it brought needed consolation to the brethren. It stopped the agitation and removed the cause of the trouble. The Gentile Christians especially were glad, since it established their true place in the church and gave them peace of mind. Judas and Silas added their agreement to the contents of the letter and exhorted the brethren to abide in its contents. It was carried by Paul and Silas on their journeys to the churches (Acts 16:4) and probably many copies were made. Luke preserved it in this fifteenth chapter of Acts, and thus it was preserved for all generations to come.

Conclusion

The early church under inspired men has left many examples to encourage the right actions for Christians today.

We can know in their examples how to handle the difficulties concerning doctrine and how to conduct ourselves in dealing with problems. Paul wanted Timothy to know how he ought “to behave himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). He also wrote to Timothy, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Matters affecting the salvation of men should be settled by the Holy Spirit through the apostles teaching (Gal. 1:8-9). Any and all who reject God’s plan of salvation reject the Holy Spirit by which all men are forgiven! This departure from God’s plan is no small matter and should have our closest attention. We have the Will of God which has been given permanently in written form, which does not allow altering nor any changes from man (Jude 3).

The blessings of forgiveness are only given to those who obey the simple truths of the Gospel and come into Christ or His church (Eph. 1:3; Eph. 1:22-23; ; Eph. 4:4; ; Eph. 5:23). To those who are consecrated Christians, the knowledge of the truth is always a matter of joy and rejoicing (Phi.4:4)!

When “No Small Dissension And Disputation” arise over things legislated by the Lord Jesus Christ, we need to be encouraged as brethren to “Stand Up For Sound Doctrine” (Mat. 28:18-20).

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CHAPTER 9

Encouraging Christians To Redeem Their Time

Robert Stapleton

We are, perhaps, more time conscious than the many generations that have preceded us. As we consider our history, we take note that our forefathers used to take weeks, months, or even years to accomplish what we can do in a very brief time. Having been in the construction business for a number of years, I was amazed at the length of time it would have taken to build a house with the tools used a hundred years ago.

Only a couple hundred years ago the means of transatlantic crossings were such that a voyage from Europe to America took months. Now, we complain about a five-hour flight!

The pioneers that traveled the Oregon Trail, which was a 2000-mile trip from Saint Joseph, Missouri to Oregon City, Oregon, took four to six months if there were no delays. Now, we can easily make the trip in only a few hours via modern air travel. Even traveling by automobile, that journey can be done easily in only a few days.

Such things as these emphasize the fact that of all of the commodities that we have, time is the most precious! Regardless of how many years one lives, life is easily seen to be brief (Jam. 4:14; Isa. 40:6-8; 1 Pet. 1:24; KJV). For whatever

reason, it seems that the older one grows, time seems to pass at a much faster pace than it did when they were but a child. So often, when we are doing that which is enjoyable, time passes ever so quickly by! Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, and other special events make us aware of the passing of time.

Looking back to the time of the Psalms, we are able to see that not only was time recognized to be brief, it was also understood to be precious (Psa. 90:10; Psa. 90:12). As we consider the years we have, we acknowledge that we are not the owners of the time that we have. We are only stewards of what God has so graciously given into our care in this area just like we are in so many other areas. Because of the fact that we are stewards of the time we have, we must recognize that some day we will give an account of it to God who “loaned” it to us.

In comparison to times past, we have more labor- and time-saving devices than any generation before us, but we are still too “busy” to visit or be visited; to enjoy home life and companionship with our families; to grow in Bible knowledge; to worship God; and to prepare for eternity. Over the years I have heard a number of people complain about how little time they had to do the “important” things of life. Yet, when confronted with the question of what would they do with additional time if it were granted, it became clear that most of such additional time would be used for some selfish pursuit of a worldly venture that has little or nothing to do with spiritual matters.

Because of such dominating our society today, we need to get back to basics when it comes to proper use of what time we have at our disposal. With this in mind, our lesson at this hour is designed to assist us in facing the sobering challenge that we have to “redeem the time.”

What It Means To Redeem The Time

The English Standard Version translates the Greek phrase used in Ephesians 5:16 (*exagorazómenoi tón kairón*) to say “making the best use of the time” which well conveys the Apostle Paul’s point. Similarly, the same thought is expressed in Colossians 4:5 in the English Standard Version. I have also heard it expressed as “buying up the opportunity.” In other words, as Christians, we should be conscious of what time we have in order to accomplish what it is that God would have us to do. The Judgment Day will be the wrong time to give thought to “making the best use of the time” that God has so graciously granted us!

Why Redeem The Time?

The Apostle Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, provided information as to why Christians should “redeem the time.” It was “**because the days are evil.**” Earlier in the fifth chapter of Ephesians, we take note of the fact that Christians were forbidden to have “fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11). Because of what Paul instructed, a choice had to be made. They could not both have “fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” while at the same time “make the best use of the time.” As it was with so many matters of life, the early Christians well understood the necessity of choosing on a regular basis between who it was they served (Mat. 6:24) and what they did in serving God.

As we bring this text up to more modern times, we find that sins committed in darkness in years gone by are now paraded in broad daylight before the world as if such actions are somehow actions of those in the right. Unmarried pregnant high school seniors once were not allowed to graduate with the other students. Now, it seems as if it is a badge of honor for unmarried young girls to walk across the

platform showing their baby bump. Homosexuality in the past was something that was kept in the closet. However, over the past several years the closet doors have been thrown open.

Not all that many years ago profanity was reserved for backroom discussions of the basest type of people. Today, you can hardly turn on your radio or television without hearing it brazenly spoken. Our children are inundated with modern music that is filled with profanity. It seems that in almost every walk of life, profanity has become a common practice in today's society. Even many who claim to be Christians commonly sprinkle their speech with words that are far from having been "seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). I recall having heard of the gospel preacher that had a disagreement with another preacher on Facebook and resorted to profanity to get his point across. How could this gospel preacher possibly believe that he was making the best use of the time with such language? Others, who might not use the more commonly used words of profanity, see no problem in using euphemisms that simply take the place of the more offensive words, as if this somehow eliminates them from the responsibility of using language that God would approve.

Divorce used to be uncommon, especially among those that professed to follow the Bible.

However, today it is different! A Barna Group study in 2004 indicated that so-called "Born again Christians (are) just as likely to divorce as are non-Christians." Every year we receive numerous applications from men seeking to apply to Brown Trail that are living in marital relationships that they have no right to be in (Mat. 14:3-4; Mat. 19:9). When confronted with the truth about their situation, many are incredulous that we will not allow them to attend.

Perhaps we have not yet reached the point that the world of Noah's day had reached (Gen. 6:5) when God's patience

ran out (Gen. 6:6-7), but how long will it be before we do so? With a steady downward spiral away from that which is right, we cannot hope to end up anywhere else but where they did. This is confirmed by the problem of the lack of morality as is seen nearly everywhere we turn. A study conducted in 2003 entitled “Morality Continues to Decay” indicated that “a majority of Americans believed that gambling, co-habitation and sexual fantasies” were “morally acceptable” (The Barna Group, “Morality”). Ten years later, things have not gotten any better when it comes to such matters!

The study went on to reveal that the matter of modesty seems to no longer be a matter for which we should be concerned. A few years ago, while walking through an area of Fort Worth, Texas, called “Cow Town,” I picked up a flyer from the sidewalk which said, “Lost, modesty. If seen ignore; has no apparent value and there’s no reward.” I could not believe what I was reading, but neither could I deny it since I held the advertisement in my hand. So long as this mentality thrives in a society, whether of ancient times or of the present, there is only one way for man to go.

We need to redeem the time **because of the brevity of time** (Psa. 39:4-5; Psa. 89:47; Jam. 4:14). There is little doubt but that every one of us can think of someone we knew whose life was cut short. The first funeral that I conducted was for a 14-year boy who practiced football, came in the house, sat down in the recliner, and died of a heart attack. As we consider the brevity of time, we would do well to exercise the wisdom of the crane and swallow as seen in Jeremiah 8:7.

We need to redeem the time **because of the tragedy and consequences of sin** (Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 6:23). As we consider the world about us today, we see that too many people live as if there are no consequences to their actions. It is as if we believe that we have the right to act any way we want and not

have to face the consequences for doing so. However, when the Word of God is considered, we see that such a view is incorrect, as we will be judged according to what we do in this life (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10).

We need to redeem the time **because the time of our death is coming unless the Lord comes first** (Heb. 9:27; 2 Tim. 4:6). It is evident from both life experience and Scripture (Mat. 24:36) that we do not know when either of these events is going to happen, but we know one or both is going to happen in our lifetime. We may not see the coming of Christ “in the clouds” (Mat. 26:64), but we know He is coming someday (1 The. 4:16-17).

We need to redeem the time **because the time of judgment is coming** (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16). A number of Scriptures in the New Testament help us to understand that judgment is coming and what will be involved with that judgment. For example, the Apostle Paul reasoned with Felix concerning “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” (Acts 24:25). On another occasion, Paul wrote to the Romans concerning the fact that “all shall stand” before the judgment seat of Christ” (Rom. 14:10). Jesus gave emphasis to the fact that at that time “before Him shall be gathered all nations” (Mat. 25:32). He further elaborated on how the “sheep” would be separated from the “goats” (Mat. 25:32-33), indicating the separation of the righteous from the unrighteous.

We need to redeem the time because **“now is the day of salvation”** (2 Cor. 6:2). When it comes to man’s obedience to the gospel, the past is gone, the present is with us, and the future is unknown. Because of this, we should seize the opportunity to do what God would have us to do, knowing we may never have another opportunity to do so. We may be like Felix who trembled at the knowledge of the truth, but

who waited for a convenient season that, so far as we know, never came for him to obey (Acts 24:25). James helps us to understand the urgency of doing God's will, not knowing what the "morrow" may hold (Jam. 4:13-15).

How Can I Redeem The Time?

As we consider how to redeem the time properly, we note that Scripture reveals unto us the need to **"walk in wisdom toward them that are without"** (Col. 4:5). The word *walk* (*peripateite*) found here is an imperative, and as such the Colossian brethren were being commanded to walk in wisdom in such a way as to make the most of every opportunity concerning those that were without. There is no doubt that this includes teaching them the gospel (Mat. 28:19-20) as salvation is the greatest need that man has, and it is the gospel that is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16).

We need to **"walk worthy of the vocation wherewith"** we have been **"called"** so that God might be glorified (Eph. 4:1; Mat. 5:16). The phrase clearly refers to the Christian life being one that is consistent with the claims of being Christ like in our day-to-day lives. In our society today, it is not uncommon to hear people who are walking very unworthily be referred to as "Christians." What must be understood is, if our walk is not one that is indicative of our following the steps of Christ, then our walk is anything but Christian (1 Pet. 2:21). When sin is dominating one's life, they are not walking as Jesus did, since although He "was in all points tempted like as we are" (Heb. 4:15), He refused to give in to those temptations (Mat. 4:1-11). To "redeem the time" properly, we need to conduct our lives in a manner worthy of our calling as seen here and in other locations (Phi. 1:27; Col. 1:10).

In order to redeem the time, we need to be busy developing and growing as children of God (Eph. 4:15; 2 Pet. 3:18). The inspired writer of the Hebrew letter chastised those to whom he wrote concerning the fact that they had failed to grow as they should (Heb. 5:12). There is clarity in the words, “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers.” However long those to whom this was written had been Christians, it was long enough for them to have matured in the faith more than they had. The word ought (dei), as used here, indicated the idea of that which they were obligated. In the early days of one’s Christianity, it stands to reason they will be babes in Christ. However, as time passes, there is a moral obligation to grow or to mature in the faith (1 Cor. 14:20). They had no excuse having had the opportunity to sit at the feet of learned men of the 1st century that had special abilities to teach (Eph. 4:11), and who saw that the gospel was taken “to every creature which” was “under heaven” (Col. 1:23).

The Apostle Peter stressed the need for Christians to “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word” (1 Pet. 2:2). There is no doubt when an infant is hungry. He will let you and everyone around know. He will not be silenced until he is fed sufficiently to take away that feeling of hunger. Our desire for knowledge of God’s Word should be such that we meditate day and night (Psa. 1:2) on the Truth that is found therein. Anything less than that should leave us feeling unsatisfied and hungering for more.

In order to redeem the time, we need we need to take time to read and study the Bible on a daily basis (Psa. 119:105; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 2:15). Very little time is being spent doing so today by those who profess to be Christians. I recall having read somewhere that only 4% of those that profess to be Christians have read the Bible through once or more in

their lifetime. In order for us to be able to “give an answer” for “the hope that is in” us (1 Pet. 3:15), we must study to prepare ourselves to do so. We are not going to learn God’s Word sufficiently by attending the assemblies of the church, even if we attend all four services per week. At the best, the assemblies provide us with less than three hours of study per week. The attitude of the Bereans, which was commended by the Apostle Paul, is what should be seen in our lives. We should receive “the word with all readiness of mind” and search “the scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11). Anything less than a daily study program will rob us of the knowledge that is available to us.

In order to redeem the time, we need to take time to worship God properly (Psa. 122:1; Heb. 10:25; John 4:24). The worship of God has always been somewhat of a “playground” for the devil. Careful study of the Bible identifies four types of worship: ignorant (Acts 17:16-31); vain (Mat. 15:8- 9); will (Col. 2:23); and in truth (John 4:24). When it comes to the worship of the church, the sovereignty of God has been displaced by the sovereignty of the consumer (i.e., the worshiper). Christianity is being marketed, packaged, and sold to a secular-minded consumer. What we have ended up with is worship that is “user friendly,” but a considerable difference from the worship seen in the New Testament as practiced by the early church. In other words, whatever pleases man is the rule. If we want mechanical instrumental music, we have it. If we want drama presentations, we have them. If we want choirs, quartets, or other types of special singing, we have them. If we want to follow the practices of the denominational world and incorporate testifying into the assemblies of the church, we have it. All of these and so much more are found with no regard to the words of the Apostle Paul in Colossians 3:17.

In order to redeem the time, we need to **take time to pray** (Mat. 6:6; 1 The. 5:17). It has been said, “Seven days without prayer makes one weak.” Careful study of the New Testament reveals the emphasis that was placed upon prayer in the lives of the early Christians. The study of such passages as Acts 6:4; Acts 12:5; Acts 16:13; Acts 16:16; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2 and 1 Peter 4:7 reveals that the early Christians were persistent in their prayers as Jesus had taught in the Parable of the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8). Today, though, it is different. It has been suggested that the average Christian prays 3-7 minutes per day, including prayer at meals. With this in mind, it can clearly be said that the problem with the average Christian is just that; he is average!

In order to redeem the time, we need to **take time to train our children** (Pro. 22:6; Pro. 29:15; Eph. 6:4). Indeed, as stated by the Psalmist so long ago, children are a “heritage of the Lord” (Psa. 127:3). Christians that are blessed to bring children into this world are confronted with the endless problem of trying to train them in such a way that, as they reach the point in life that they become accountable to God, they will remember their Creator in the days of their youth (Ecc. 12:1). The tragedy, though, is that so few parents are stepping up to the plate to see that this is done as God would have it. I have heard it said that Christians spend seven times as much time on entertainment as they do spiritual matters. If this is true, and I have no reason to doubt it in many cases, then consider the problem it presents to those who should be “seeking first the kingdom of God” (Mat. 6:33) when it comes to the rearing of their children, but who put the things of this world first. Once I delivered a Mother’s Day sermon where I all but begged the mothers of young children in the audience to put God first on Sunday nights and set a proper

example for their children, only to see not a single one of them return that very night. How tragic!

Many times I have thought about my four children and considered the fact that if they are lost it would not be because I failed as their father to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). It is long past time that we parents understand that “job one” as a parent is to provide our children with the spiritual guidance they need to set their paths right.

In order to redeem the time, we need to **take time to be thankful** (Col. 3:15; Eph. 5:20). As children of God, we have so much for which to be thankful! We should be thankful for the grace and mercy of God (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 2:11; Eph. 2:4; 1 Pet. 1:3). We should be thankful for the love of God as manifested in His giving of His “only begotten Son” (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). We should be thankful for the purchase price that was paid to redeem us from condemnation (Acts 20:28; Rom. 5:8-9; 1 Cor. 7:23; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 5:9). We should be thankful for the many spiritual blessings that have been provided us “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). We should be thankful for the prayers that God hears and answers according to His will (1 John 5:14). How fortunate we are as Christians, for God to so provide for us that we have had “given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). May never a day pass without our pausing and expressing our thanks to God for all He has done for us! And may we constantly be aware of His unspeakable gift (2 Cor. 9:15) given so long ago so we might have life and the abundance of joy that comes with it!

Conclusion

There is no question, in comparison to eternity, life is short. We know we are not promised tomorrow. Because of

this, let us be careful to not be like those of old who said, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved” (Jer. 8:20).

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CHAPTER 10

Who Called For Barnabas...And Desired To Hear The Word of God: The Encouragement That Comes From Hungry Souls

Brent Arnold

Have you ever been really hungry or thirsty? Most of us normally have more than enough to eat and drink. However, there may have been a time when you needed to fast for an extended period of time because of a medical exam or operation. When you are hungry, it is impossible to think about anything other than food. The pain churning in your stomach makes even the simplest meal appear appetizing. When you are thirsty, your mind is flooded with thoughts of *Dasani*, *Gatorade*, and *Coca-Cola*. With that in mind, consider these words of Jesus, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Mat. 5:6; KJV). God wants us to have hearts which desperately desire Him and His Word. We are to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Like a man who has not eaten in two days wants a *Quarter Pounder*, we are to desire to serve and obey God.

Why would we not be passionate about serving God? The Bible says, “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). God saw that we needed to be rescued from sin, and He made the greatest sacrifice imaginable. He did not sacrifice one of many angels or one of many sons. He sacrificed His only-begotten Son. He gave us His very best, and He deserves and demands the same from us.

Why was God so displeased with the church at Laodicea? John wrote,

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. (Rev. 3:15-17)

They were satisfied to give God less than the best they had to offer. They were hungry for riches and goods. They were thirsty for luxuries and high fashion. They were not passionate about worship and service to God. God deserved better from them. God demanded more from them. God wants hearts that are hungry for Him.

God promises that those who hunger and thirst for Him will be filled. God will bless their lives with good things. He will fill their lives with opportunities. A soul which hungers for God’s Word can have a contagious effect on others. Barnabas’ life certainly had this kind of influence upon others. He was a man who was hungry to study, understand, live, and teach the Word of God. He was so

effective in lifting others up closer to God because he was so passionate about allowing the Word of God to shape his own heart and mind. In this lesson, we are going to examine an episode from his life which illustrates this characteristic in Barnabas' life (Acts 13:1-12). As we examine this episode, we will discover areas in which the Lord's church will be edified by hungry souls.

Hungry Souls Become Powerful Leaders (Acts 13:1)

Evidently, the church at Antioch was blessed with an abundance of men and women who were hungry for the Word of God. This hunger had developed a congregation with fine leadership. Among the leaders at Antioch were men like Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul.

The church at Antioch had been a leader in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles in their area (Acts 11:20). In fact, they were the first to have the honor to wear the name *Christian* (Acts 11:26). Soon, they will be leaders in taking this effort beyond their borders. This chapter marks a turning point in the book of Acts and the history of the church. While the first twelve chapters centered on the work done in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, the remaining sixteen chapters will focus on the effort to take the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. The church at Antioch was at the heart of this mission.

Congregations which possess leadership of this caliber are bound to have a dynamic impact on the world. The old adage says that some people make things happen, others watch things happen, while others are left wondering what happened. The church at Antioch had leaders who were making things happen to the glory of God. Their place of leadership was not the seeking of a position of power but consisted of setting an example that others could follow.

Take Manaen as an example of their faithfulness. He had been brought up in the home of the same Herod who was responsible for beheading John the Baptist. At some point, he learned the truth and renounced his family heritage. These men had the courage to remain faithful to the truth as they were teaching and prophesying. They also had the conviction to practice what they preached on a daily basis.

There is no easy path to effective leadership skills. They are forged in the fire of daily discipline and conviction. General H. Norman Schwarzkopf said, “Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without strategy” (Kruse). Those who preach and teach the Word must be ever mindful to try to stir the hearts of potential leaders in the church.

Hungry Souls Become Humble Servants (Acts 13:2)

For these men, leadership was not a claim to fame but an opportunity to serve. The text tells us that they “ministered to the Lord and fasted” (Acts 13:2). *Ministered* is from *leitourgeo* which originally meant “to discharge a public office” and was “used of the Attic orators who served the state at their own cost” (Robertson 3:177). In this passage, it describes men who knew they had a job to do and they were performing their duty to the fullest of their ability. As servants, they were committed to sharing the love of Christ, following the life of Christ, and teaching the Words of Christ. In an earlier chapter, one can find a form of the word *minister* used in reference to both the care of the widows and the preaching of the Word (Acts 6:1-4). This usage shows how both of these works are critical in the ministry of the church.

Their ministry was devoted to “the Lord.” They were not serving for their own glory or any earthly benefit. They were hungry to honor the Lord in every way they possibly

could. They were not concerned with gaining a following for themselves or entertaining crowds with their speeches. They had no interest in achieving earthly accolades. They strongly desired to see God's kingdom advance as far as possible. They were ready to serve that purpose even when called upon to suffer in the process.

The fact that they fasted as they ministered reminds us of the sincerity with which they served. They did not rely merely upon their own strength or wisdom but they earnestly sought the Lord's help in prayer and fasting. The New Testament does not bind fasting upon Christians today. Still, periods of prayer and fasting will naturally come for those who are hungry to serve in the Lord's kingdom (Mat. 6:17; Luke 5:33-35).

What made these men so eager to serve the needs of others instead of their own interests? They had been deeply impressed by the perfect example of the Lord Himself. They realized that "...the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mat. 20:28). John Newton, the converted slave trader who wrote the beloved hymn *Amazing Grace* had these words put on his tombstone: "A servant of slaves." These men had also been touched by the magnitude of His grace toward all mankind. They wanted, more than anything else, to dedicate their lives to following His example. As Paul later wrote, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:11-12).

Hungry Souls Become Zealous Workers (Acts 13:2-5)

As these men were ministering, the Holy Spirit revealed His special plans for the work of Barnabas and Saul. You

may have heard the expression, “You cannot steer a parked car.” God is “not likely to take idle Christians down from the shelf, dust them off, and entrust them with important work” (MacArthur 191). It is not surprising that the Holy Spirit would present this opportunity to men who had already demonstrated their hunger to work for the Lord. Barnabas and Saul were happy to enter into the mission field. They were willing to separate from all that was comfortable and familiar in order to reach the lost souls of Asia.

This piece of history contains a valuable lesson for the success of missionary efforts. Successful missions depend equally upon the efforts of those who go and those who send. Barnabas and Saul were willing to travel the exhausting miles, stand in the synagogues, and visit the homes in order to preach and defend the gospel of Christ. These men were supported by the folks who remained at Antioch who also had a vital role to play. They sent these men into their work with many fervent prayers and laid hands upon them to show their own confidence in these men for this effort.

The laying on of hands here was not for the purpose of imparting spiritual gifts as at other times (Acts 8). It was a gesture which showed the congregation’s endorsement of the qualifications of these men for this work. This gesture would have powerfully strengthened the hearts of Barnabas and Saul.

The work of the church thrives in the zealous effort of those who go and those who send. The church continues to have a desperate need for those who will go from house to house with the Word of God (Acts 5:42). The church continues to also have a desperate need for those who will support those who go with their finances, prayers, and encouragement.

Barnabas and Saul were fortunate to have the Holy Spirit as their guide for the beginning of their first missionary journey. John Mark would travel with them to assist them

in any way that he could. Evidently, he saw some things that opened his eyes on this trip and decided to return home before the journey was finished. This will be the cause for contention between Barnabas and Saul later on.

At the seaport city of Seleucia, they boarded a ship on which they sailed approximately one hundred miles to the island of Cyprus. Cyprus was familiar territory for Barnabas (Acts 4:36). On the island, their work would begin in Salamis.

The logical place to begin would be in the synagogues of the Jews who were already most familiar with the Scriptures. Many people would be naturally gathering there and this would present them the greatest opportunity to spread the Word. Through the preaching of Barnabas and Saul, they would have the opportunity to see that Christ is the “end of the law” (Rom. 10:4). Through faith and obedience to the gospel of Christ, they would have the wonderful opportunity to receive the forgiveness of their sins and the salvation of their souls (Mark 16:16). This would more than repay all of the effort and sacrifice they have invested in this campaign. Hungry souls understand what is at stake. They want lost souls to have the opportunity to be forgiven before it is eternally too late. In light of the urgency of their mission, they work with zeal.

Hungry Souls Become Courageous Heroes (Acts 13:6-8)

It did not take long until the missionaries ran into resistance. Anyone who is faithfully preaching the truth of God’s Word will eventually encounter opposition. In fact, Jesus warned His disciples to be concerned if they ever faced a time when they were not experiencing some form of opposition. He said, “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). Before Barnabas and Saul had even

traveled from one end of the island to the other, they were faced with opposition.

This experience evidently had a drastic impact upon John Mark. After this episode, he decided to abandon the campaign and return home (Acts 13:13). Whatever his reasons were, Paul did not consider them to be valid (Acts 15:36-40). Hungry souls cannot afford to buckle under the pressure of persecution. As Paul said, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). It seems that Mark eventually learned that lesson and became a valuable defender of the faith (1 Pet. 5:13; Col. 4:10; Phil. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11). Barnabas was able to encourage him to strengthen his resolve.

This challenge came when they entered the city of Paphos. Paphos was a city full of immorality. The city was known as a center for the worship of Aphrodite. “Extensive religious prostitution accompanied Aphrodite’s rites at Paphos” (Pfeiffer and Vos 306). Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark encountered a Jewish false prophet named BarJesus. Evidently, he was using sorcery to convince his followers to believe his false prophecies. He had a close association with the deputy of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus. However, Paulus was a man of prudence and intelligence. He was keenly interested to hear the Word of God. He wanted to be informed about this new teaching that was sweeping his island. Elymas (BarJesus’ Greek name) felt threatened by the possibility that Paulus would convert to Christianity so he tried to turn the deputy away from the faith.

This scene reminds us that the process of carrying out the Great Commission is much more than an academic debate or making of a sales pitch. We are engaging in an all-out war against the evil influences of this world. Satan has never been one to surrender easily. Therefore, we must

expect to face resistance as we endeavor to teach the truth. We must have the grit to cling to our task at any cost. Hungry souls will not give up because too much is at stake. Hopeless souls are depending on us to bring them the good news that only Christ can provide.

The father of Origen, a third century theologian, was arrested for being a Christian. Origen, only seventeen, was aflame with the desire to follow his dad and share in glorious martyrdom. His mother pleaded with him not to go, but the headstrong boy did not want to listen to reason. His quick thinking mother did what she could. She hid his clothes. Though Origen stormed and protested, she would not reveal where they were hidden. He could not leave the house, so he was unable to volunteer for martyrdom. Interestingly, Origen was brave enough to be martyred, but not brave enough to go outside naked (“A Different Kind”). Let us pray that God will give us stronger backbones. Let us resolve to climb over any obstacle in our efforts to spread the Word of God.

Hungry Souls Become Fruitful Laborers (Acts 13:9-12)

Paul had an opportunity to bring salvation to the life of Sergius Paulus and he was not about to allow anyone or anything prevent that. Paul was not alone in this effort. He was filled with the Holy Spirit who was equally eager to save the soul of Paulus.

Paul fixed his gaze on the enemy, Elymas, and described him with blunt precision. Elymas did not truly have supernatural powers. He was full of deceit and fraud. He was not a son of Abraham (in faith) or a child of God. He was a child of the devil. He was an enemy of all that is good and right though he claimed to promote the truth. He was perverting the right ways of the Lord though he claimed to be a prophet. He was not what he appeared to be.

False prophets will always appear to be something that they are not. They may appear to be harmless and good. On the outside, they appear to be godly men who love the Lord. However, their quality must be determined based on their doctrine and their practices and not by their appearance. Consider the vision which John saw, “And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon” (Rev. 13:11). This beast is later identified as the false prophet (Rev. 19:20). You will notice that the beast has two horns like a lamb. In appearance, he reminds John of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). However, you find out who he really is when he opens his mouth. He speaks like the dragon, and that is the criteria by which he will be judged. Paul warned that Satan will present himself as an angel of light and his servants will present themselves as ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14). Appearances can be deceiving. Like Paul, we must be discerning. When we identify false teachers, we must be bold to face them and oppose them.

Paul seems to have taken the lead on this occasion which presents an interesting fact. Prior to this occasion, Luke would mention Barnabas first and Saul second. After this occasion, he will refer to Paul first and Barnabas second (Acts 13:46). Barnabas was certainly a leader in encouraging the downtrodden and rejected, but Paul was a leader in discouraging the stiff-necked and hardhearted (Gal. 2:11-13). At Antioch, Paul was bold to withstand Peter to the face when he showed prejudice toward Gentile Christians. Sadly, Barnabas got caught up in the group and did not restrain the men from James. Even the hungriest of souls will have areas where they need to continue to grow. Hungry souls do not ignore these areas of their lives. They double their efforts through prayer to overcome these weaknesses.

Elymas received much more than a mere tongue lashing. He had been guilty of producing spiritual blindness, so he was now stuck with physical blindness. He claimed to be a spiritual guide, but he was humbled when he needed someone to take him by the hand and lead him. His blindness would only be temporary, but I would imagine that the impact would last much longer. Paul was able to demonstrate the true power of God, and this confirmed that he was preaching the true message of God. One would hope that Elymas got the message himself and reacted accordingly. Sadly, the text does not specifically state whether or not that was the case. The deputy, however, did take this message to heart and acted appropriately. He was amazed by what he had seen and heard and came to believe in the Jesus that Paul was preaching. Though the text may not explicitly mention it, he would have also been baptized in obedience to the Lord's command. Paul and Barnabas refused to give up on his soul. Their persistence was rewarded with a fruitful victory. This text should remind us why we cannot afford to give up easily in the winning of souls. Fruit will come only to the patient and persistent. As the Bible says, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise" (Pro. 11:30). We should also keep Paul's words in mind, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9).

The church at Antioch stands for all time as an example of an effective church. They were blessed to have many souls which were hungry for the Word of God. They were hungry to understand the teachings of God's Word. Most of all, they were hungry to live out these principles in their lives. Their hunger was powerful in bringing many lost souls into fellowship with the Lord. Many of those souls had previously been Jews, but they also took the lead in

evangelizing Gentile communities. Their hunger for the Lord produced powerful leaders, humble servants, zealous workers, courageous heroes, and fruitful laborers. Their powerful example should inspire us to increase our appetite for the Word of God as well.

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CHAPTER 11

Encouraging Family Devotionals: Bringing Our Children Up In The Nurture And The Admonition Of The Lord

Kyle Butt

The dream of all faithful Christian parents is to see their children immersed into Christ one day and added to the Lord's church. The process to bring a child to this course of action does not happen accidentally. It takes determined parents who are willing to sacrifice their own time, go against a sinful culture that is controlled by the devil, and dedicate themselves to their God-given task of bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In light of that, this manuscript will offer several ideas that can be used to encourage family devotional time.

The Church of Today

Most of us have been in a worship service when this has happened. An older gentleman scheduled to lead the opening prayer for a regular Sunday night service walks to the podium and begins praying. In the course of the prayer, he asks the Lord to be with the teenagers of the congregation since **“they are the church of tomorrow.”** This phrase is one of those “favorite” phrases that often gets repeated in prayers.

This “church of tomorrow” concept suggests that younger Christians and teenage Christians are “second string” players who are sitting on the sidelines, waiting their turn to get in the game. It is as if teens’ actions, words, and contributions to the church do not really count now, but one day they will. The problem with this idea, however, is that it could not be more wrong. If a young person has been baptized into Christ, he is just as important of a member of the Lord’s Church as anybody younger or older. There are no players on the bench in the Lord’s Church. Every Christian’s actions, words, and contributions can be just as helpful, or harmful, to the Lord’s cause as any other members, regardless of age. Teenage Christians are not the Church of tomorrow; they are the Church of today. This point should be stressed in family devotionals and at home so that our young people will understand that they are important, active members of the cause of Christ.

Think About Who Does What

The other day I was speaking at a youth rally and a young man approached me after the lesson. He mentioned that he was having serious doubts about God and the Bible, but his friend in the youth group had invited him to this particular event. He said that the lessons that had been presented changed his life and really helped him realize that God is real. If it had not been for his friend in this youth group, this young man might have continued in his path of doubt and atheism for the rest of his life. When we look at what group of people in the church is inviting their friends to hear the truth, and standing up for God’s Word on an daily basis, we see that the teens often are more active than any other group in the church. Teenagers are the most enthusiastic, productive evangelists in many congregations around the world.

In fact, what group travels hundreds of miles to knock doors and help smaller congregations put on evangelistic campaigns? Teenagers. Who often makes up a large part of the Summer mission teams that go to foreign countries and conduct medical mission trips? Teens. Who pours countless hours into after school devos, lock-ins, youth retreats, Bible studies, and Internet blogs and texts about God, Jesus, and the Church? Teens. While I am not in any way trying to disparage what the older people of the Lord's Church are doing, it is a fact that many times, the most productive workers in the church are teenagers. When we explain this to our children, they understand how much good God can do through them.

That is How It Has Always Been

The fact that teens are often some of the most vital, productive workers in the Lord's Kingdom is nothing new. As you look into the Bible, you see that teenagers have always been a crucial component in God's plans. Many of the most memorable stories in the Old Testament involve teens who were dedicated to God's cause. For instance, when David was "but a youth," he visited his brothers in the camp of Saul. During his visit, he saw a giant Philistine almost 10-feet high who taunted the Lord's people. He was astonished that none of the older soldiers in the Lord's army were willing to fight the giant who was mocking God and His people. Even King Saul was scared to fight the menacing Philistine. When David told Saul that he would fight the giant, Saul told David that he was not able to fight the giant because he was just a youth (1 Sam. 17:33; NKJV). The word *youth* in this verse most likely means a teenager or a person not much older than 20 years old. You, of course, know that David did not think his youthfulness was a hindrance and neither did God. God used the young man David to kill Goliath, route the Philistines, and bring honor to His name. David was not "the

army of tomorrow.” He happened to be the only soldier that was willing to fight the battle that was happening right then.

The names Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are quite familiar to all of us. These three young men were most likely teenagers when they were ripped away from their homes in Israel and transplanted into the pagan, idolatrous land of Babylon. They were given every opportunity to forsake the Law of God that their parents had taught them and adopt the pagan, sinful ways of the Babylonians. But these young men purposed in their hearts that they would not forsake the God of their fathers, and their powerful stand for the Truth is recorded in the Bible as an example for all people, young and old, to follow.

Joseph was sold into Egypt when he was seventeen. In Egypt, he was elevated to be the head over Potiphar’s house—an extremely prestigious position. Furthermore, Potiphar’s wife tempted him on a daily basis to sin, yet Joseph would not yield to her. Eventually God used Joseph to save all of Egypt, Canaan, and the Israelites through whom the Messiah would come. Some of Joseph’s most valiant victories for God occurred when he was a teenager.

In the New Testament, we see God working through young people as well. Of all the women in human history that God could have chosen to be the earthly mother of Jesus, He chose Mary. Most historians believe that Mary was about 15 or 16 years old when the angel Gabriel announced to her that she was going to be the biological mother of the Messiah. Her faith in God’s Word is a powerful testimony to the fact that God often uses teenagers to do some of the most important jobs in His Kingdom.

The apostle Paul repeatedly used the young preacher Timothy to do some of the most crucial tasks in the early Church. Paul knew that some members of the Church would

think that Timothy's young age was a hindrance to his ability to be productive. Yet Paul knew that was not the truth. In fact, Paul told Timothy: "Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). Not only was the young preacher an example to other people his age, but he was an example to the entire church, both old and young alike. Furthermore, most historians believe that Titus was also a teenager (or not much older). Young people have been vital to the Lord's cause throughout human history.

Alex's Lemonade Stand

In 1996, Alexandra Scott was born to Jay and Liz Scott in Manchester, Connecticut. Just before her first birthday, she was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a very serious childhood cancer. She battled the cancer for four years and was given a special treatment in 2000. While in the hospital, she told her mother that she wanted to set up a lemonade stand in her front yard to help raise money to give to the doctors who help her so that they could try to find a cure for cancer. True to her word, when she was released from the hospital, she set up a lemonade stand in her front yard and raised \$2000 that year, which she gave to the hospital.

Each year she continued to set up her stand, and each year the proceeds from her sales grew. Others heard about her courageous fight against cancer, and her desire to raise money to find a cure for the dreaded disease. Soon, hundreds of "Alex's Lemonade Stands" across the country were raising hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. Tragically, in 2004, Alex lost her fight with cancer at eight years old. But before she died, she knew that her efforts had helped inspire others to raise over one million dollars to fight cancer. Furthermore, Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, to date, has raised over 30 million dollars and funded over 100 research projects in

efforts to fight cancer. A four-year-old with a vision changed the world forever. Age is not nearly as important as a desire to see the Lord's Kingdom spread. When we teach our young people how powerfully God can use them in His service, this will strengthen the Lord's church. What can you do as a teenager, not tomorrow, but today, that will change the world forever?

Teaching Children the Value of Work

Work is not a four-letter word. Well, of course we know that technically speaking, the word *work* is spelled with four letters. But by the way some people in our society treat the word you would think it was as profane as words that are "real" four-letter words. In fact, in some ways, our society tries make us think that work is something to be avoided like the plague. We hear about get-rich-quick schemes that require little effort and pay big dividends. Spam e-mails offer us a 100% guarantee that if we try their plan or product we can retire at age 32 and never have to work another day in our lives. Is work really that bad, something to be put off, to shy away from as long as possible? As Christian parents, we need to instill in our children at an early age that God has designed them to be hard workers, and that He has work for them to do.

Keeping the Wolves Away From the Door

No doubt you have heard the story of the three little pigs. The three pigs ramble off into the world to make their fortunes. The first pig hates work so he builds his house of straw; second pig does not like work much either so he makes his out of sticks. The third pig likes to feel safe in his house, so he builds his house out of bricks. By and by the big bad wolf comes along and blows down the houses of the first and second little pigs and they race as fast as their porky

little legs will carry them to their brother's brick house. The wolf cannot blow that house down, tries to get in through the chimney, and gets a burned backside as a reminder of what chimneys are used for. Of course, the moral of the story is that work keeps wolves away from your door, and it helps you feel safe and secure.

Now, most of us have in our minds the idea that when God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in the beautiful Garden of Eden to live a life of ease and leisure—with no work to do at all. But that is not how it was. When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in the Garden of Eden “to tend and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15). The word *tend* means to “cultivate.” They were designed to enjoy seeing how their hands and ingenuity could make the world a wonderful place. When they sinned, God cursed Adam to a life of much harder labor, but work was always a part of God's plan. Work was not a curse; it was a part of the original creation that God said was “very good.”

That is why, when we look in the book of Proverbs, the text says: “In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty” (Pro. 14:23). There was a time when I might have argued with the validity of this verse. Let me explain. When I was about 14, my dad had a “job” for me and my two brothers. He told us to go pick up rocks out of field that was about 10 acres. When we saw the field, and the rocks, we were stunned. Have you ever seen how many rocks one 10-acre field can hold? Just when you think you have cleared a 2 foot wide section of field you pick up a foot-ball sized rock to see that it gave birth to 4 baseball-sized rocks hiding underneath it. And underneath those rocks is a quaint little nest of 8 more golfball-sized rocks, etc.

We worked for countless hours picking up bazillions of rocks. We knew we would never be able to pick up all

those rocks. And, guess what, we never did. To this day there are still rocks in that field. What a waste of time....or was it. Every rock we picked up made us stronger, got our blood pumping, kept us off the couch, helped us be better football and basketball players, helped keep our minds off junk, and gave us a sense of accomplishment. In all labor there is profit.

The story is told of a farmer who was raising 7 sons. He worked them hard on the farm, feeding cows, hauling hay, bringing in the eggs, building fences, and a thousand other things that “needed” doing on the farm. One of his neighbors saw the way he was working his boys and accosted him: “Farmer, you don’t need to work those boys that hard to raise crops and cows. You could do it with a lot less work.” The farmer looked at him briefly and replied, “I’m not raising cows, I’m raising boys.” In all labor there is profit.

Worse Than an Infidel

Some time ago a notorious atheist named Christopher Hitchens died of cancer at the age of 62. He was famous for a book titled *God Is Not Great*, in which he blasphemed the God of the Bible in words that we would not use to describe the dirtiest dog. He was an infidel, an unbeliever, whose life was spent in complete rebellion to God and who is forever going to reap the reward of the wickedness that he sowed during his brief life. It would be worse than a tragedy for any one of you reading this book to live such a reckless, corrupt life. Yet, before we get carried away decrying the wasted life of an infidel, there is something you should know. There are some things that, in God’s eyes, are worse than the rebellion of infidelity. In 1 Timothy 5:8 we read: “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Did you hear that? Can you believe it? If an able-bodied man is

not willing to work to supply the needs of his own house, he is worse than an unbeliever.

I would hate to stand at the Judgment Seat of God on the final day and be in Christopher Hitchens' shoes. But as odd as it may sound, I would be even more terrified to know that I refused to do the work that God had designed me to do. Why do you think that God said: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on...that they may rest from their labors and their works follow them" (Rev. 14:13). Those who enter heaven will have been working on Earth and will be looking for a place and time to rest. But that place and time is not while they are on Earth. [Do not misunderstand, I am not advocating workaholicism, I am simply saying that work is good, in all work there is profit, God designed us to work, and a man who refuses to do his share is worse in God's sight than an atheist.]

Brother to A Great Destroyer

Picture this: There is an evil villain who has his warped mind set on killing a great number of people. He devises a scheme whereby he looses a bolt on a railroad car pin. That bolt is the one that holds the pin that holds the passenger cars to the engine; if it does not hold, the cars get disconnected and the passengers in the cars race at breakneck speed down the hill and plummet to their deaths. Sounds demented and dastardly, would you not say? Now picture this: A guy working in a factory does not take his job very seriously. He is just there for the buck he gets paid, and he does not think he owes his employer a thing. The fact that he is there should be enough, and he feels little, if any responsibility, for the finished product. He happens to be the one who is hired to put the bolt on the railroad car pin that holds the lead car to the engine. He is lazy and does his job haphazardly. He puts the bolt on wrong, the cars get

disconnected and...you know the rest of the story. Listen to Proverbs 18:9: “He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.” The villain in our little story wanted to kill people. The factory worker was just lazy. But the result was the same; lots of people died. That is why the Proverbs writer could say that a lazy person is the brother of one who intends to destroy.

You have heard the old saying, if a job is worth doing, then it is worth doing right. In Ecclesiastes 9:10 we read: “And whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.” We need to teach our children that if they work in a factory and put in bolts for a living, then they need to be the best bolt assembly technician they can be. When I was growing up, my mother always told me that I could be anything in the world I wanted to be. And if it turned out that I wanted to be a solid waste disposal engineer (we used to call them garbage men) that was great, as long as I was the best garbage man I could be.

Work is Work

In all work, there is profit, and there are many different kinds of work. When we think about work, we often visualize factory work, or working on a farm, or cutting grass, retail sales, etc. There are varying jobs, and often the mental, spiritual work is just as difficult as manual labor such as hauling hay or working in a factory. In fact, there are lots of people who are willing to do the “easy” manual labor but simply will not apply themselves to more difficult mental or spiritual work. There are many who would rather haul bricks for 10 hours a day than study a book and get an education.

When we look into the Bible we see the many different jobs being commended by God. For instance, the apostle Paul said that it is right and good for preachers who “labor” in the Gospel to get paid for their job (1 Cor. 9:9-14). [It is

also interesting to note that while Paul commended paying preachers, he also worked with his hands to support himself by making tents.] People often joke that preachers work for three hours a week, two on Sunday and one on Wednesday night. But the Bible says that preparing lessons, teaching, and studying God's Word is hard work.

In Acts 6:1-7 the early Church had a problem. Some of the widows were being left out of the daily distribution of food for the needy. The apostles knew that somebody needed to see to this work and take care of the widows. But it might surprise you to know that the apostles said they were not going to do the job of caring for the widows, but instead were going to give themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). The apostles were hard at work preaching and praying, and it was just as valuable a work as distributing food to the poor. In Colossians 4:12, Paul's companion Epaphras sent his greetings to the Colossians. Paul noted that this faithful man was "always laboring fervently" for the Colossians "in prayers." Epaphras "labored fervently in prayer." God has created us each to do a job that we are specifically designed to do. Let us get to work.

A Job Well Done

One day, if we have trained our children well, and they have labored in the Lord's Kingdom, they will hear the most welcomed words that any mortal could imagine: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter in to the joys of the Lord." The fact is, there is nothing like the feeling of being a faithful servant, of a job well done. There is just something about looking at a barn filled with hundreds of square bales of hay neatly stacked to the ceiling, knowing that you had a hand in moving every one of them. There is nothing like flipping through the pages of a freshly printed book that you spent hundreds or thousands of hours researching, writing,

proofreading, rewriting, re-proofreading and getting to press. Flipping through a research paper that received an A is so gratifying. Looking over a well-cleaned kitchen floor or baking a loaf of bread renders a feeling of accomplishment.

Not many years ago there was a fine Christian young man who was engaged to a fine Christian young woman. Everything seemed perfect, and then tragedy struck. The young lady was diagnosed with a very serious form of cancer. Throughout the entire ordeal, the young man was by her side, never faltering, always there for her. One older Christian lady commended the young man for his faithfulness to her. His response was classic. He simply said, “I am just doing my job.” That is what we need to do and teach our children to do—our jobs.

Teaching Our Children to Understand Authority

Most of us understand the principle of authority quite well. If a man off the street bangs on your door at 11:00 o'clock at night and demands that you let him in your house, you call 911. But if a police officer with a search warrant bangs on your door at the same time of night and demands that you open up “in the name of the law,” then you let him in. Why? Because the police officer has been given the authority by the government to come into your house. But the man on the street has not been given that authority.

Think about this example of authority. If a five-year-old storms into his teenage brother's room and tells him to get off the phone, the brother does not obey him. Yet, if the teen's father knocks on the door and tells him to get off the phone, that is an entirely different situation (at least it should be, read Ephesians 6:1).

So who gets to make the rules? Who says that the father can tell a teen what to do but a little brother cannot? Who

says that you must open the door for a policeman but not for a strange man off the street? Who has the authority to make the rules?

The very simple answer to that question is Jesus Christ. He has been given **all** authority. He makes the rules. In Matthew 28:18, the Bible says: “And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’ ” Jesus told His disciples that He had been given the power (by God) to make all the rules.

Let us think about that. Jesus is not the one who decides how fast the speed limit should be. He is not the one who decides what time a teenager’s curfew is. How does He have all authority? The answer to that is simple. He has delegated some authority to other people. That means that He has given certain people or groups the right to make some rules.

For instance, in Romans 13:1 we read, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” In this verse we learn that God gives governments the authority to make certain rules. Governments have the authority to tax people. They have the authority to set speed limits and many other similar things. Their authority stops, however, when they make a law that goes against something found in God’s Word. In Acts 5:29, the apostle Peter and others told the authorities that they would not stop preaching about Jesus because they “ought to obey God rather than men.”

In the same way, God, through Jesus Christ, has given parents the right to make rules for their children. In Ephesians 6:1-2, we read: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise.” Parents have been given the authority to decide where their children should go, who

their friends should be, how they should spend their time, and other things like that. Just like the government, however, parents' authority stops if they attempt to try to make rules that go against the Bible. If parents tell their children they must lie, cheat, or steal, they have overstepped their authority. God has not given them the authority to make rules that go against His Word.

With that understanding of authority in mind, we need to apply the principle to spiritual things. In Mark 2:1-12, we read a very interesting story about four friends of a paralyzed man. Believing that Jesus could heal their friend, the four friends tried to get into the house where Jesus was teaching. Unable to get through the door because of the large crowd, the friends went onto the roof and removed enough of the tile to lower their friend down to see Jesus. They were expecting Jesus to heal their friend. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." The Jewish scribes who heard Jesus were angry. They correctly believed that no one could forgive sins but God. That was Jesus' entire point, He was showing the people that He was God in the flesh and had the power to forgive sins. In order to add further proof that He was God, He healed the paralyzed man. The scribes were right to believe that only God has the authority to forgive sins. They were wrong not to recognize that Jesus was God in the flesh Who had the authority to forgive sins.

Today it is the same. God has given the authority to forgive sins to Jesus Christ. If we obey the words of Jesus and the inspired apostles and Bible writers, to whom Jesus gave authority, then we will be forgiven of our sins. If we do not obey Jesus, then we cannot be forgiven. No preacher, parent, or teacher on Earth today has the authority to create a different way to be saved than what the Bible says. Only

God's Word, the Bible, has the authority to tell us what we must do. For instance, we should not lie. Why should we not lie? Should we tell the truth because others will like us better? Should we tell the truth because it always feels better? Not really. We should not lie because the inspired Bible writers tell us not to lie, and the Bible has the authority to tell us how to live. [As a side note, please remember that every one of the rules that God makes is for our own good. God created us and knows exactly how we ought to live to have the most abundant, happy lives. Just like a parent knows that a child needs to eat vegetables, and cannot survive on chocolate cake all his life, God knows what our spiritual needs are.]

Let us apply the principle of authority to our worship. First, we must remember that God makes the rules in worship. He is the only one who has the right to tell us what He wants and does not want. We cannot change the way God has told us to worship. It would be like a man selling a stolen car; we might change it, but we are doing so without any authority.

Also, studying worship helps us to learn another very important lesson about authority. Sometimes the person who has the authority explains exactly what he wants; other times he lets people use their own judgment.

For example, suppose a farmer tells his hired help to go and build him a barn. That is the only thing he says that he wants—a barn. With that type of instruction, the farmhand can use pine wood or oak wood; he can paint the barn blue, pink, or red; and he can make it one, two, or fifty stories tall. All he was told to do was build a barn. Now suppose the farmer told his worker to build him a red barn made of oak wood, two stories tall. With these instructions, the worker is limited to only one kind of wood, one color, and one height. The farmer does not have to tell the worker **not** to use pine, maple, cherry, cedar, etc. He simply needs to say what kind of

wood he wants. He does not have to list all the kinds of wood he does not want.

This can principle can be seen in the story of Noah's ark. God told to build an ark "out of gopher wood." We never read a single verse where God told Noah not to use pine, oak, or cedar. But Noah did not use any other wood. He used only gopher wood, because that was the kind of wood God gave him the authority to use.

In New Testament worship, the principle works the same way. For instance, every time we read about the Lord's Supper, we see that two items were used—unleavened bread and grape juice. The apostle Paul instructs the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 11:17-34) about taking the Lord's supper, using the bread and the "fruit of the vine" (a biblical term for grape juice). But what if we do not think that unleavened bread and grape juice taste good? Can we add some jelly to the bread and mix some cola to the grape juice? Certainly not. Why? Because God has told us exactly what He wants, and we do not have the authority to add to it or take from it. We can eat the unleavened bread out of a silver tray or a golden colored tray. We can drink the grape juice out of a glass container or a plastic container. We could eat this Lord's Supper in an auditorium or in a house where the congregation is meeting. God has not told us where to eat it or what to use to serve it. He has, however, told us what items to eat and drink. When He did that, He excluded all other items.

In Colossians 3:17, we read: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." What does it mean to do everything "in the name of the Lord Jesus"? Remember the illustration about the policeman who came to your house with a warrant. He told you to open the door "in the name

of the law.” That means that the law gives him permission to make you open the door. If we do everything “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” that means we do only those things that Christ gives us permission to do. This verse again shows us that only Jesus, through the New Testament, has the authority to tell us what to do and how to live.

Throughout our children’s lives, they will need to know and understand the principle of authority. It is our duty as parents to teach them this at an early age and one of the best ways to accomplish this is through family devotionals and home studies. Let us be diligent to use the family structure God has given us to teach our children about their own value to the Lord’s cause, the worth of hard work, and the principle of authority.

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CHAPTER 12

Let Us Go Again: The Recurring Need For Encouragement

Clark Sims

Life would surely be much easier if things that need to be done could be one time and that would cover it. It would be nice if you could fight off temptation one time and have it defeated, never to have to deal with again. Unfortunately, that is not the way it works. Potiphar's wife pressed Joseph "day by day" (Gen 39:10; NKJV). What about poor Samson? Delilah "pestered him daily with her words and pressed him" (Jud. 16:16). In Matthew 4, you can be sure when the enemy departed from Jesus and the angels came and ministered to Him that the enemy was coming back. That is simply our reality. The same concept is present in our study today. Barnabas will show us the value of a continuous, recurring encouragement. John Mark will show us the need for a continuous, recurring encouragement. Just as sure as we need daily meals, we need to be uplifted and encouraged regularly. Barnabas, whose name was given to him because of his encouraging spirit, kept his eyes open to those around him. What could he do to lift them up? What did he see?

As we turn our attention to the assigned text, I will not be choosing sides in the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. I am thankful much good was done within the kingdom based on how these men dealt with this contention. I will be focusing on the continual encouragement of Barnabas toward John Mark. In Acts 15:36, Paul made the request of Barnabas that they go and visit the brethren where they had preached and see how they were doing. Barnabas embraced the idea with a singular request. He wanted them to take John Mark with them on this trip. It was at this point that the old friends and brothers in Christ had a sharp disagreement. Paul wanted nothing to do with taking John Mark. He had accompanied them before and it had not ended well. He was not telling Barnabas anything he did not already know. Take a look back at these men in Acts 13. They were involved in grueling mission work. In the midst of their work and travel, John Mark bolted! He left the work. They were depending on him and he left the work. Paul could not get past this. He could not forget. He was very concerned about the way John Mark accompanying them would affect their work. Clearly, he had reason. But Barnabas was different. He knew the same things Paul knew. His perspective was simply different: I do not want to give up on him. I want to take him with us. I want to give him another chance. You can see what the apostles saw in him when they gave him that name that meant “son of encouragement.” This was the parting point between Paul and Barnabas. They went their separate ways. Paul went to work with Silas and a young man named Timothy. They headed, ultimately, toward Macedonia and a ministry that affects us even today. Barnabas, on the other hand, takes with him John Mark and begins to fade into silence in Biblical history. But, before we move on, I think it would be only fair, since we looked back at John Mark’s history, to look forward

into the future. In 2 Timothy 4:11, that same Paul, who wanted nothing to do with traveling with John Mark, made a strong request. “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11). What made the difference? How did he go from useless to useful? It seems it was directly tied to a man true to his name who kept on encouraging when all the evidence said quit. We surely need more men like Barnabas. For the rest of this study, we will try to identify what Barnabas saw.

See the Mirror

When Barnabas committed to Christ through obedience, He meant it. From the time we begin reading of him early in the book of Acts, we read of a man who was willing to give of himself for the good of others and for the good of the cause. When deciding what to do with John Mark, his initial dilemma would force him to take a look at himself. How am I going to deal with the “man in the mirror?” In reality, every act of encouragement will have to work its way through this dilemma. Before I can encourage others, I have to deal with myself. See the mirror.

See Despite Yourself

Barnabas knew John Mark well. He was there when they first took him on the road. He was there in Acts 13 when John Mark left the work behind. In Acts 15, Paul was not sharing any kind of new information with Barnabas. He knew it all. In fact, because of his relationship, he likely was more aware than Paul of John Mark’s immaturity and need to grow up. Everything Barnabas knew and had seen deep within himself gave him reason to give up. The evidence against John Mark had mounted. For Barnabas to step up and continue to give him encouragement could only be done by putting aside what he knew and what he saw. Mac Layton observed, “A real

Christian is willing to take the risk of being misunderstood or criticized in order to rescue a brother or sister in Christ who has fallen” (256). Somehow, we must push ourselves to see what can be, despite what has been done. This is probably a good point in the study to remind us that this is not the first time Barnabas has faced this same struggle between what he knew and what could be. Saul of Tarsus was a tormentor of the church. He did set out to persecute and destroy the Way. He was authorized to drag Christians off into prison. He was in full agreement with Stephen being stoned. There was evidence to back each of those statements. And Barnabas knew it. How different could the history of those early days of the church had been had Barnabas not encouraged Saul, when so many would not? He saw what could be, despite what he knew! See despite yourself.

See Within Yourself

Like Barney Fife to Andy Taylor and Barney Rubble to Fred Flintstone, when you get to Acts 15 you find Barnabas functioning as the number two man to the Apostle Paul. There was a time when it was Barnabas and Saul. That day was gone. It was now Paul and Barnabas. I have heard it said that the most difficult instrument to play in the orchestra is second fiddle. It would be very easy for Barnabas simply to go along with Paul, even if it meant leaving John Mark behind. It seems Barnabas had a very real question to answer. His question should be our question. “What can I do?” Not what can someone else do? Not what can I not do? He asked, “What can I do?” He looked deep within himself to determine what he could do to give John Mark the boost he needed. He made a choice that took him into anonymity that took his name off the front page. From our perspective, he became a man in the shadows. From our perspective, much of what we know of Barnabas from this point forward is tied to the life and

character of John Mark. I remember a number of years ago when I was finishing as a student at the University of Alabama and looking for a job teaching elementary school. Both of my parents had jobs in the school system and I know their good names and reputation helped me to get an opportunity. But I also know when I took that job, people's view of my parents would be tied to the name and work ethic that I carried. It is interesting, is it not? Barnabas looked within himself to identify what he could do, and he did it. We respect Barnabas even more today because of the man John Mark became. There is great value in recurring encouragement. See within yourself.

See Beyond Yourself

It is humbling to be standing on the doorstep of your fiftieth birthday. It is humbling to be on a basketball court with your three sons ranging from ages 16-21. It used to be so different. I continue to be reminded that life is moving forward. It does not slow down for any of us. You begin to think not just about what you are doing, but also the legacy you are leaving. What impression will your life make in the future? Clearly, Barnabas understood the significance of seeing beyond himself. John Mark would be a very real part of his legacy. I am reminded of the grumpy lady who came out of the auditorium and said to the preacher, "All I ever hear is give, give, give." To that, the preacher observed, "That is the finest definition of Christianity I have ever heard." Barnabas embraced that mentality. It was not about him. He saw beyond himself and demonstrated a pattern of continual giving, from the time he sold his property in Acts 4 to taking John Mark with him on the road. Barnabas never appeared to be in the business of drawing personal attention. He seemed to be "ready to serve." The recurring nature of his encouragement appears to be less about what he did and

more about, simply, who he was. Again, there is no surprise the apostles chose to give him this name. See beyond yourself.

See the Ministry

We struggle to see the big picture. Our eyes can be so focused on the right now that it becomes very easy to ignore the future. There were reasons to move forward and leave John Mark behind. Your moment might be easier because of it. That would be one less burden to deal with. But Barnabas saw the big picture. He saw value for the future and for the cause by giving this young man a break, by standing with him when it seemed no one else would. See the ministry.

See the Value of the Family

Colossians 4:10 tells us that John Mark was a physical relative of Barnabas. The verse says he was his cousin. Let us go ahead and throw out the cliché *blood is thicker than water*. I do not want to shed any negative light on the fact Barnabas gave great attention to his family. I consider it a great positive. From the beginning, God has placed responsibility on the relationships within the family unit. The New Testament speaks of “taking care of your own” and “loving your wife” and “bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” There is a dependence placed on those family relationships. If Barnabas felt a special tie to John Mark because he was “kinfolks,” good! The world needs more of that. Their association with family marks so many special times in a person’s life. These can range from times of celebration to times of deep sadness. On most occasions, the phone call at three o’clock in the morning is reserved for family. Who do you most likely go to in times of trouble and great need? The first instinct is to lean on family. Jesus spent much of His earthly life under the influence of family. From the cross, He wanted to know that His mother was taken care

of. Andrew first went and found his brother and brought him to Jesus. For Barnabas to reach out to John Mark is totally expected. It is how things should be. To be clear, numerous people outside of the family unit were encouraged over and over by Barnabas. I surely would not suggest he would have ignored John Mark if they were not kin. But the fact that they were family certainly increased the desire on the part of Barnabas to reach out, not give up, and do everything he could to support and build up John Mark. I remember standing at the plate when I was ten years old at Kentuck Park in Northport, Alabama. The bases were loaded as I stood ready to hit. I looked out over the center field fence and saw my daddy standing there. He had rushed to that spot from work to see me play and to encourage me. That forty-year memory is fresh in my mind like it was yesterday. There is something really special about family. We should never minimize its value. See the value of the family.

See the Value of the Team

Barnabas was a team player. He saw John Mark as a teammate. He wanted to do everything he could to bring out his best. Being a part of a team forces you to look at things from a perspective of “we” instead of “me.” You are more inclined to go the extra mile for your team. For a team to be successful, selfishness cannot exist. When my son, Christian, was very young, he wanted to help me take the garbage cans to the road. The truth is, it was more difficult for me to carry those cans to the road with him than it would have been by myself. But I knew it was more important for him and more important for us for him to give me that assistance. Best does not always mean easiest. As has been mentioned numerous times, the reputation of John Mark was earned. He was immature and had abandoned an important work. There was reason to be concerned. In his commentary on the

book of Acts, J. W. McGarvey noted, “Paul’s judgment was controlled in the matter by his high estimate of the courage and self-sacrifice which ought to characterize a preacher of the gospel” (2:75). It would take work. It would take time. It would take sacrifice. Barnabas was willing to pay that price. He valued the team and his teammates that much. In Colossians 2, Paul longed for the brethren, “that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love” (Col. 2:2). See the value of the team.

See the Value of the Cause

I remember watching a number of years ago a movie telling the story of the battle of Gettysburg. One of the amazing visuals was the flag bearer who would march in front of his fellow-soldiers holding high their flag. If that man was shot, another soldier would drop his gun and rush to pick up that flag. The cause meant so much. There is something about the cause. Peter knew. John knew. Paul knew. Yes, Barnabas knew. The cause is bigger than any of us. The cause sustains us and is what we will carry into eternity. My hope is built on the cause. And as sure as the world stands, the cause will go on long after we are gone. Barnabas understood the value of the cause. He was willing to fill any role, render any service, and make any sacrifice for the cause. He would travel or stay in a given location for the cause. Make no mistake, when he saw John Mark, he saw the cause. “Exciting and fruitful days were ahead for Paul and his new team of workers. At the same time, Barnabas’ efforts to help Mark realize his full potential as a servant of the Lord were unbelievably successful” (Roper 42). The time is right for all of us to be asking how much the cause means to us. When Paul wrote, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phi. 1:21), he wrote of the value of the cause. Barnabas would never give up on John Mark. The cause meant too much. Consider your team of choice.

Put yourself in a large stadium surrounded by over ninety thousand people. They yell. The band plays. You are wearing the colors. The team runs on the field. That is quite a day. Get past the physical world with its limits. Consider the cause that is not bound by any physical limitations. Barnabas saw it and lived for it. See the value of the cause.

See the Man

In Luke 15, Jesus taught us a valuable lesson on perspective. He taught us about a shepherd who had one hundred sheep. Ninety-nine of those sheep were right where they were supposed to be. One sheep had gone astray. Jesus did not promote resting on the laurels of your high success rate. He did not encourage you to pat yourself on the back for this high percentage. Instead, He challenged us to continue to keep our eyes open. Go get the one! The one matters! At the end of the day, Barnabas could not forget about or neglect the one. “Everyone needs someone who says, ‘I believe in you.’ Everyone longs for someone who knows his imperfections yet will stand by his side through thick and thin” (Johnson 128). Even though their travels would take them into the presence of a mass of people, that one John Mark still mattered. Barnabas could not forget about him. See the man.

See the Capability

In John 1, Jesus saw something in Simon that others did not see. In fact, when Jesus gave him a name that meant a “stone,” He was giving him a name that he did not even see in himself. One of the great traits of an encourager is identifying capability. What can a person accomplish? Is it a skill? Is it a trait? Is it a characteristic? It could be obvious. It could be under the surface. It could be a slight glimmer. We all benefit from that person who has been in our corner. We benefit

from that person who has seen in us what we did not see ourselves. In the midst of the immaturity and abandonment of the work, Barnabas saw something. He saw something in John Mark. He saw capability. Maybe he saw leadership traits. Maybe underneath the surface he saw a servant's heart. Maybe he saw an ability to interact with people. Whatever it was, he saw it. Because he saw it, he went about the business of doing what he could to help bring it to the surface. Before it became reality, he saw useful in the useless. One of the most tragic, descriptive statements that can ever be made is they had "wasted potential." Could it be that the difference between "wasted potential" and "talents used" is that person in the corner providing true encouragement? Keep your eyes open! Not all talents are easily observed. See the capability.

See the Vulnerability

I doubt a point will be made in this study more important than this one. John Mark was vulnerable. He could go either way. He was straddling that fence between capability and immaturity. He had shown himself to be a quitter. He had given up before. It would be so easy for that life pattern to continue. He did not need much of a reason to give up completely. Refusing to take him on the road just might be it. It can be very easy to find a reason to quit if you look hard enough. The vulnerable is a dependent character. He will take his cue from someone. The direction of that cue will be up to the encourager. The man whose name meant "encouragement" had a keen eye to observe vulnerability. After all, this was not the first time. He saw vulnerability when Saul came to Jerusalem. How many people are under our influence that could go either way? It is not comfortable on the fence. A person will not stay there long. Timing matters. It is very humbling to realize how much of a person's destiny you hold in your hands. Likely, all of us in one way

or another have been at that point of vulnerability. We could have gone either way. Are you not thankful for that dear soul who gave you a boost in the right direction? Again, keep your eyes open. The vulnerable are not always easy to identify. Sometimes the vulnerable can have a smile on their face. See the vulnerability.

See the Possibility

“Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11). How did we get here from “Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work” (Acts 15:36)? How did we get from a documented quitter to “Bring him here, I need him”? The answer can be found in the simple phrase *Barnabas saw possibility*. Barnabas’ vision was not limited to what was. His vision included what could be. The road from capability to possibility is paved with recurring encouragement, as long as it is not derailed at vulnerability. Am I doing what I can to give possibility a chance? Or am I helping to shut doors before they really even open? The future depends on you, Barnabas. See the possibility.

Close

Take a quick test. What would your name be if you were given a name totally based on your character and conduct? What if people who knew you named you based on your character and conduct? A fairly random brother in Christ named Joseph faced that test. He passed it with flying colors. He was given a name from the apostles based on what they saw, based on his conduct. That name was Barnabas which means son of encouragement. He was never more true to his name than when he stood up for John Mark. All evidence seemed to say give up on him. Barnabas continued to

encourage. He refused, with conviction, to give up on him. “God, help me to be more like Barnabas. Help me to live so that others are better because of my influence and support. Help me to keep my eyes open to what can be. Thank you God for the opportunity to serve. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

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CHAPTER 13

But Barnabas Took Him In: Encouraging New Converts And New Members

Neil Richey

It must have been an exciting time to be a Christian. After all, there never had been one prior to the Pentecost following the resurrection of the Christ (Acts 2; KJV). It was on that selected day, the first day of the week, that the Lord built His church establishing forevermore the place where the saved would sit.

The saved? Yes, those who had repented of their sins, confessed their faith in Jesus as God's Son, and were immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins (Luke 13:3; Rom. 10:10; Acts 2:38).

Where the saved sat? Indeed. It was and is the church of Christ—not a place built with bricks and mortar, but a people saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). It was on the first day of the week that Jesus' church was established and forever changed the lives of God's disciples. It marked the beginning of a fellowship unlike any other—a fellowship with God and with His people (1 John 1:5-7; 1 Cor. 1:10).

It was during this time that thousands upon thousands were added to the body of Christ. On the first day, there

were at least 3,000 souls converted to Jesus by the simple message preached by the Lord's apostles (Acts 2:41). That was an impressive beginning. Yet, what catches this writer's eye all the more is a little statement found at the end of Acts 2. Luke, the writer of the book, tells the Bible reader that the church grew from that time forward. He said, "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

Today's church wants results like this—daily growth. Yet, she is sadly not receiving such. Why? Maybe it is because an eldership fails to recognize that the congregation's main purpose is outreach and not in-reach. Or it could be that the local preacher sees his job as keeping tabs on brotherhood politics instead of getting out of his "office" and telling a soul about Jesus. Still, and more problematic, is a church membership that is often more concerned about what the church can do for them rather than what they can do for Jesus and His church.

The book of Acts records the fascinating birth and growth of the church. It is a growth that came about because of a church membership that worshiped God—reaching up (Acts 2:42); cared for one another like family—reaching in (Acts 2:44-46); and showed their love for, and consequently were favored by all the people—reaching out (Acts 2:47). It is this divine plan, that when properly implemented, has the power to save souls. It will work!

If a soul is won through God's plan above, what must the church then do to maintain, or to keep the saved, saved? May this writer submit that the key is edification. Whether negative, like a loving parent corrects a child, or positive, encouragement is vitally important to keeping members and strengthening new ones.

The book of Acts tells today's followers of the Christ about a first-century Christian encourager by the name of Barnabas. Barnabas' name gives some insight into his earthly existence. The name Barnabas means "son of consolation, or encouragement." The Bible student's first introduction to Barnabas is in Acts 4 when brethren were in the state of need and this encourager, "Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:37).

However, the focus of this study takes us to another context entirely. In Acts 9, the careful Bible student reads about the persecutor who will become the persecuted (1 Cor. 15:9). He sees the disobedient one who becomes obedient (Acts 9). He observes the evangelized who will become an evangelist (Col. 1:28). This person, you see, is Paul an apostle. Yet, before he can be promoted to such rank of service in the kingdom of Christ, he first is called Saul and is in much need of a brother, an encourager.

Upon his obedience to the Gospel of Jesus, he immediately went to work. As fierce a competitor to the Gospel before his conversion he was, all the more, a soldier of the cross after his conversion. He spoke so boldly for Jesus that the enemies of the Son of God sought to kill Saul. It is with these thoughts in mind that attention is now turned to this text:

And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let *him* down by the wall in a basket. And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all

afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought *him* to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. *Which* when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. (Acts 9:23-30)

From this passage, three observations will be made. In so doing, one will have a better appreciation of what it therefore takes to be an encourager of brethren, just like Barnabas.

Barnabas Was An Encourager Who Loved His Brother

Luke tells the reader that Barnabas “took” brother Saul. It is as if Barnabas reached up and grabbed Saul by the arm to hold on to his brother. Perhaps it was an embrace. Maybe he held his arm. Or at some point maybe even the embrace of a brotherly hug took place. No matter the extent of the meaning of that little word, the love of one brother for another was evident.

Some are converted to Jesus, initially, out of a need to belong to a family. They have never known what it was like to be part of a loving family. A family, in point of fact, that says “I love you.” While it is not with frequency that brethren tell one another “I love you,” it is certainly Biblical. Jesus

asked Peter, “Do you love me?” (John 12:15-17). Jesus said that the two greatest commandments are to love God and then one another (Mat. 22:34-40). If those are the greatest commandments, then it stands to reason that saying it from time to time would be appropriate.

Love for the brotherhood is at the heart of New Testament Christianity. Consider the following: 1) “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Cor. 13:13). 2) “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8). 3) “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). 4) “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Love is the greatest quality. Love is an identifier of the greatest being. Love is the greatest action. Love is the greatest obedience.

There is no greater trait that will help the new convert, the aged member, the brotherhood, or the world at large than the quality of love. But what kind of love is it? Was it an emotionally driven love? Perhaps it was friendship only driven love, like Peter’s response to Jesus—“you know I like [phileo] you.” The answer is no. While both are good, right, and needed, the driving force of the Christian’s very being is a heart of *agapao*—sacrificial love. One of the best, yet simplest definitions this writer has heard for the word *agape* is that it is a love that will give his very best for someone else without the anticipation of anything in return. Was that not the love put on display 2,000 years ago at Golgotha’s hill (John 3:16)? Is it not expected that we have the mind of Jesus (Phi. 2:5ff)? If so, then should the love of every Christian be the same as His?

Barnabas Was An Encourager Who Lead His Brother

When a brother is loved the way Jesus loved, then that same brother will lead as well. In Acts 9, Luke says that

Barnabas “brought” Saul to the apostles. That is, Barnabas led him away. Saul was led away from those who would do him harm. He was then led to his brethren, the same who would become his fellow apostles.

Consider the ordeal that Saul had been through. It must have been chaotic. He was formerly a murderer of Christians—if even by proxy. Now, truly converted and committed to the cause of Christ, he is trying to speak boldly for the Savior whom his sins and likeminded actions helped slay. It is no wonder that his brethren would be somewhat apprehensive toward Saul. That is where Barnabas, the encouraging leader, came in.

While getting someone in the waters of baptism is relatively easy, keeping the saved, saved can be a challenge. So, why do some leave the church so quickly?

A love for Jesus is lacking

In the parable of the soils (Luke 8), one reads about four types of soil—good, way side, thorny, and rocky. In the interest of time, consider just two of these—the rocky and the thorny. The rocky soil is the one that receives the seed, which penetrates the soil, but because of the rocks beneath the soil, it soon loses root. With the thorny soil, the word is received, but when the plant that the seed produces grows, the thorns choke the life out of it.

Some Christians are like rocky soil. They receive the Word, but when temptations, trials, or persecution come along, they just quit and walk away. Some new Christians face a great deal of ridicule from friends and family, and if they are not strong and do not have a good support system within the church, in point of fact a church full of Barnabases, they will often walk away from the church and never return.

Other Christians are like the thorny soil. Just when they really start to grow, they are bombarded with the things of

life—some of which are very legitimate. Sometimes it is a profession. For others it is pleasure (by the way, God is not anti-pleasure). Others are overwhelmed with riches. Many get wrapped up with recreational pursuits and hobbies. None of these things are inherently wrong but allowing them to take number one priority in life hurts God and will eventually cause him to walk away from Jesus and His church.

A life-changing event happens

Good brethren will sometimes become unfaithful because they suffer loss—enduring great trial within their own lives or in the lives of someone they love.

Sometimes that loss is a spouse. Some have left the church because of the loss of a child—due to illness, war, or some other tragedy. Others have left Christ and His church because they have lost their job. Still yet, there are folks who leave the church because of family crisis—death, divorce, sickness, a move, and so on.

For some, the loss is more than they feel they can bear. The word *feel* is used because God will never give one more than he can bear. There is not one trial that man will experience where God does not give a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13).

While trials assuredly will come, this writer is convinced that it is not the trial but instead failure of Barnabas-like Christians to surround him and keep the struggling Christian close to Jesus.

Church leaders do not point the way

By “church leaders” one could surmise that the eldership is implied. While that may be true, there is a sense in which every Christian leads. So far as this writer knows, Barnabas was not an elder in the church, but he was clearly a leader.

Leaders will aid new converts and even struggling Christians by getting them involved. Everybody is capable

of at least one ministry. It is the “one talent” man concept. Most people do not have multiple talents. Yet everyone has one. Add to that, not everyone has the same talent. Some are great personal workers, but terrible song leaders. Others are great song leaders, but cannot preach from the pulpit. That is okay. Not all have the same talents, but all have at least one talent!

Another way leaders can help encourage Christians is by having high expectations for one another and maintaining a sense of accountability. This is something that elders really need to keep in mind. Expect great things from the flock and hold them to it. When members become negligent, remind them that their dereliction of duty has a negative impact on the entire church.

Finally, help the brethren to develop the spirit of Jesus. Every child of God needs to wake up in the morning and say to himself, “Today I want to be like Jesus.” This is a quality that is taught—encouraged if you will. This is meant reverently, there needs to be more “little Christs” running around the communities in which Christians live. Elders, preachers, Bible Class teachers, Godly parents and concerned Christians should create in each one the desire to be just like Jesus (Phi. 2:5). Is this not the point of Jesus’ message when He said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 5:16)? Here the Lord is not saying to go shine one’s light, but rather, as one is going, to let that light shine naturally.

Barnabas Was An Encourager Who Was Loyal To His Brother

Barnabas presented Saul, his new brother in Christ, to the apostles, probably Peter and James. According to the Galatians epistle, the two were the only apostles in Jerusalem

at that time (Gal. 1:18-19). It was on this occasion that the apostles heard the story of Saul from his own mouth.

The context of Acts 9 tells how that early on disciples could not and would not believe that Saul was a new convert just like them. They were afraid and sent him on his way. Suppose there had not been a Barnabas to take Saul by the hand and carry him to such church leaders of the day as Peter and James. Suppose the disbelieving disciples got to Peter and James and told stories (false stories) about Saul. Think for a moment, what if Saul's reputation had been soiled by hearsay rather than truth.

Thanks be to God that while enemies of the cross go around one another, over one another, and through one another to talk about one another, there are still those with a Barnabas-like spirit who want to give the opportunity to a brother to tell his own story. In this case, Saul told about his conversion experience—how interesting that must have been. He told of his subject matter in the first presentations of the Gospel that he ever made; Christological from the beginning was the preaching of Paul. Saul told his brethren how that he debated the Greeks and the resistance with which he was met. He even shared that he faced assured execution if he had been caught as the angry hearers of Paul's message would have slain him. While there is something about gossip that is "juicy," the truth from the horse's mouth is always better.

A brother shows love for another when he is loyal to his brother—learning to give the benefit of the doubt without jumping on the bandwagon of sowing discord. Hear the facts before passing judgment. A church divided will not stand, and new converts and struggling saints will leave in an instant when brethren fail to love one another and be united together (John 17:20-21).

Conclusion

While the source is unknown, someone cleverly stated, “There is little chance for people to get together as long as most of us want to be in the front of the bus, the back of the church, and middle of the road.” The spirit that will help the church keep new converts encouraged and struggling Christians excited about the Faith, is one of cooperation. The prophet Amos asked, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3).

When God built the church, He established a relationship not only between the Christian and Himself, but with other people. The church is a body of believers united together for a common purpose—to glorify God. The church is not a one-man organization. It is the body of Christ, which is “us.”

The Ephesian letter is fascinating. In it, more than a dozen times, and in half as many chapters, the apostle Paul uses words that show a church to be a body of people designed to work together—words like *together*, *our*, *us*, and *one*. Question: what is it that pulls us together? What is that common thread that holds us together as one? The answer is, “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). It is the gospel that glues Christians together as one.

If the congregation will unite around the Bible and be grounded together in the Bible and will share in the teaching of the Bible and promote a Barnabas spirit of love, leadership, and loyalty, then the church we read about in the Bible will keep the saved, saved. It will be the church that everyone is talking about. Finally, it will be the church that all will want to become part of.

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CHAPTER 14

Encouraging Daily Prayer

Brad McNutt

Prayer is to spiritual life what air is to physical life. It is essential to one's existence! As such, many Christians today are dying spiritually or are on life support because they refuse the air of the soul, prayer.

Other than the forgiveness of sins, there is no greater spiritual blessing that we enjoy as Christians than prayer. It should be as natural as breathing but many times it is not. Why is this? Let us consider this subject together.

To begin, let us define the subject of our discussion. The word translated *encourage* in the New Testament literally means to build up a structure. Therefore, we are not seeking to guilt one into praying daily or scold those who neglect prayer. We will follow the example that works, building up each other so that we all see the need and have the confidence to commune with God daily in prayer.

In consideration of this subject, listen to the words of Jesus,

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you

pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think they will be heard for their many words. Therefore, do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (Mat. 6:5-13; NKJV)

From this text we will consider three things that will help encourage daily prayer in our lives. First, the basics of prayer will be cited. Next, some barriers that hinder prayer will be expounded. Finally, the benefits of prayer will be observed.

The Basics of Prayer

One of the reasons that prayer is often neglected on a daily basis is because many do not have a good understanding of the basics of prayer. Prayer seems like such an easy subject. However, upon further investigation, we find our own working knowledge of prayer lacking. Jesus very clearly outlined the basics of prayer during the Sermon on the

Mount when He expounded, “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Mat. 6:6).

Personal

The foundation to understanding the basics of prayer is that prayer is a personal experience. By this we don't encourage any thoughts of mysticism. Rather, we are considering the personal nature of prayer. Notice that Jesus uses the terms *you* and *your* eight times in the text of consideration.

My prayer life is not something that someone else can do for me. While it is true that others can pray for me, they can not develop my personal prayer life. Understand the privilege that is yours in this personal experience.

Perpetual

Another basic principle of prayer is that prayer is to be perpetual. Notice that Jesus said, “**When** you pray” not “if you pray” showing that prayer is to be continual. It should become a part of our daily lives. The Bible elsewhere teaches “pray without ceasing” (1 The. 5:17). The meaning behind these words is to pray without omission. Do not forget to pray! Never omit prayer from your daily routine!

Persistent

Still another basic is that prayer is to be persistent. Again Jesus said, “**When** you pray.” *When* involves many different times, experiences, and emotions. There will be times when it will be difficult to pray for many different reasons. However, we must remain persistent. Other times God wants to see how much we truly desire our petition and will grant it, if we persist (e.g. Luke 18:1-8).

Prayers

One basic of prayer that is often misunderstood is that there are different kinds of prayers. Jesus said, “When you

pray.” That statement encompasses many types of prayers. Paul explained four different types of prayers to Timothy, namely supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks (1 Tim. 2:1).

Supplications involve special requests concerning the deepest needs of the heart. An example of a supplication was Jesus’ prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Mat. 26:36-44; Heb. 5:7). Prayers have to do with devotion, speaking with God, and ever-present needs. Intercessions are prayers offered to God on behalf of others. This would include prayers for the sick, erring, and struggling. It is a request of God to help others in need or to bless them. Prayers of thanksgiving are when we offer to God our thanks for all of His great blessings both physically and more importantly spiritually.

While these are different types of prayers, all of these types can be covered in one prayer to God. This apostolic teaching does not forbid them being merged together; he simply outlines the four types of prayers.

Proactive

Next, prayer is proactive in nature. For example, many leaders are reactive as opposed to proactive. Reactive leaders wait until they must address an issue and then react to resolve the issue. Proactive leaders see the issue before it explodes and act to prevent a controversy.

Jesus explained, “When you pray, go.” Prayer is a time to seek God. We do not wait until something bad happens and then come to God in prayer. God should be sought out to help us in our lives so that we can help prevent problems. He does not have to come seeking us; we seek Him.

Jeremiah prophesied concerning this to the Israelites that would one day return from captivity, “Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with

all your heart” (Jer. 29:12-13). Jesus would later discuss this idea in the Sermon on the Mount, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Mat. 7:7). Take note of the proactive progression of this verse. We go from sitting and asking to walking and seeking to finding and knocking to be admitted. Prayer is proactive!

Place

We are informed of another basic of prayer which is the place of prayer. Jesus said, “Go into your **room**.” He was not teaching that we must be in our bedroom when we pray but rather that we should have a place that we often resort to for prayer. There are many psychological benefits to having a place of prayer. When we enter that place, we will be ready to involve ourselves in prayer because that is what we always do in that place. Even Jesus went to His place of prayer before His crucifixion (Luke 22:39).

Privacy

Yet another basic of prayer is concerning privacy. Jesus continued to teach, “When you have **shut your door**.” The concept is that of privacy as opposed to a public show that the Pharisees did continually. Our prayer lives are not for show. We are not to flaunt spirituality. This is directly connected to the personal nature of prayer.

Involved in this basic principle of prayer is also the idea of shutting out the world. We live in a fast-paced world which places high demands upon us and brings great stress. Prayer is a time to be alone and get away from the stress of life that can destroy our souls (Luke 8:14). It affords a great time of serenity.

Paternal

As the basics continue, we are introduced to the paternal nature of prayer. Jesus says twice in this passage to “pray to your **Father**.” I think many times we forget to view God as

our Father. He is One in whom we can safely confide and express the deepest thoughts of our heart. This aspect of prayer breeds intimacy, communion, and fellowship with God. We should never be afraid to pour our souls before our Father (1 Sam. 1:15).

Presence

Again, Jesus teaches us that prayer is about presence. When in prayer, we enter into the very presence of God! He explained, “Pray to your Father **who is in the secret place.**” For many years when I prayed, I viewed God as being in Heaven a million miles away. When I listened to Jesus, I learned that when I pray, God is not far off but near. Consider the thrill of being in the presence of the God of the universe and having that access any time we need Him! Yes, prayer is about being present with God.

Provision

The last basic Jesus teaches us about prayers is concerning provision. He closed by saying that the Father “will **reward** you openly.” The truth being set forth is that God not only hears us but answers us. This truth is not a question but a fact. God answers prayer. It may not always be the answer we desire, but it will always be that answer that is best for us! What wonderful news to every Christian; God provides!

The Barriers to Prayer

Having a good understanding of the basics will help encourage us in our daily prayer lives. However, with this great privilege, there will always be barriers to hinder us. Let us consider some of the common barriers to prayer and how to remove them.

Gratification And Exhibition

The first barrier to prayer has to do with gratification and exhibition. This means praying for prideful reasons

and to make a show. Jesus condemned this practice when He taught, “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men” (Mat. 6:5). Their prayers were made public and done in public places. They would pray before entering the synagogue thus holding up those who desired to enter and causing those within to view their practice. They stood in the corners of the streets praying so that they could be seen by people coming from all directions. All of this was done for pride and show.

Today, we struggle in prayer because we are doing it to be seen. We want to be praised for our spirituality and our knowledge of God. Other times our pride hinders us because we think that since things are going well, we do not need to pray to God as often. This will surely hinder our prayer lives. The key is to remember that prayer is not a time to exhibit our spirituality and that we are nothing without God, thus removing our pride.

Preoccupation

Another barrier to prayer has to do with preoccupation. Remember that Jesus said when we pray we should “go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father” (Mat. 6:6). There are many things that Satan can use to deprive us of this much needed time.

We live in a fast paced world that is demanding of our time and attention. Throughout the day we have to work, cook, clean, spend time with family, complete homework, take baths, do the ironing, and the list could go on forever. There is certainly nothing wrong with these responsibilities. They are evidences of God’s goodness to us. However, we cannot allow them to push God out of our lives. We must set aside time each day to pray. If we have a scheduling problem, then we need to schedule time to pray.

Transgression

A third barrier to prayer is transgression. Jesus said that we are to “pray to [y]our Father.” This is impossible to do when we are at odds with God. When we live a life of sin, God will not hear our prayers (Psa. 66:18; John 9:31; 1 Pet. 3:12). We have fallen out of fellowship with God. The solution to this barrier is clearly taught in Scripture. One must repent of his sin and pray to God for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). Notice that repentance comes first and then prayer!

Manipulation

A common barrier to prayer is manipulation. This is something that we often do without ever realizing our guilt. Consider the words of Jesus: “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think they will be heard for their many words” (Mat. 6:7). The Gentiles believed that they could weary their gods into responding to their requests (1 Kin. 18:26-29). To summarize, the Gentiles believed they could manipulate their gods into serving their own personal interest (Tverberg 126).

How many times have we tried to weary God with our requests? We behave like children and try to annoy God so that He will give us what we selfishly desire. We need to check our motives. God will not give us what we desire if we desire it for selfish reasons (Jam. 4:3). When we pray, we should consider why we are asking such of God. Do we want it so that we can better serve Him or so that we can have more toys and abuse the gift? Remember that God will not be manipulated and seeking to do so will hinder our prayer lives.

Frustration

A common barrier to prayer is personal frustration. Imagine those who heard Jesus delivering this sermon. He had told them not to be like the Pharisees (Mat. 6:5) and then told them not to imitate the prayers of the Gentiles (Mat. 6:7-

8). Perhaps they wondered how they were to pray. Are we not like this many times? We do not know how and for what we should pray.

Then, Jesus gives them the answer, “In this manner, therefore, pray” (Mat. 6:9). As Jesus continues, He gives the model prayer. Considering the different aspects of this prayer will help relieve our frustrations. In this prayer Jesus informs us on how to approach God with reverence (“hallowed”) and realization (“thy kingdom come”) and how to relinquish (“thy will be done on earth”). Next, He teaches us to appeal for provision (“daily bread”), pardon (“forgive us”) and perseverance (“deliver us from the evil one”). Finally He teaches us how to amen/end prayer with a focus on God’s place (“kingdom”), power (“power”), and praise (“glory”) and it is to be perpetual (“forever. Amen”).

It should be noted that we cannot pray the phrase *thy kingdom come* today. The kingdom has already come and is currently in existence (Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 1:9). However, the principle to take away is that we can pray for the current state of the kingdom/church. This outline that Jesus gives us coupled with what we have already learned about the basics of prayer will go a long way in helping remove the barrier of frustration.

Restriction

The final barrier to prayer is restrictions based upon prayer by others falsely. I have seen many people use the Model Prayer as an excuse to criticize brethren for how they pray. I remember hearing a sermon concerning prayer and when the speaker was done, I was not sure that I could pray about anything to God. I left more discouraged than encouraged! People say things like “Jesus prayed a short prayer and ours should be the same.” It would do well for these brethren to consider that this prayer given by Jesus was

a model/outline and was not meant to be exhaustive! They would do well to read the prayer of Jesus at the end of His life (John 17).

Contrary to the restrictions that people place upon prayer, the Bible teaches that we can talk to God about anything! Peter wrote, “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). We are later instructed to “come boldly to the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16). The word translated *boldly* was a word used to describe the rights of a citizen to speak freely in a town hall meeting concerning any subject that was on his mind, a right not given to a slave (Reese 69). We are citizens of Heaven (Phi. 3:20). Therefore, we have the privilege to speak with God openly about anything on our minds!

The Benefits of Prayer

No study of prayer would be complete unless we examined the benefits of daily prayer. Truly, God daily loads us with benefits (Psa. 68:19). Prayer is a way to strengthen and revolutionize our Christianity. Let us examine what Jesus said were some of the benefits of prayer.

Refuge

The first benefit of prayer is refuge, a place to which we can resort for safety from the world. Remember that Jesus taught that we should not pray to be seen of men (Mat. 6:5) or to have to say perfectly recited prayers (Mat. 6:7). Because prayer is a private, personal practice, we do not feel the pressure to be perfect. No need to worry about being criticized for not being perfect or for saying the “wrong” thing in prayer. The world sometimes wants us to do the impossible, to be perfect. It is a great refuge to be able to be in a place of safety with our Father with no worries of being judged for being imperfect.

Prayer is also a refuge from the business of the world. Jesus said we are to pray in our room and shut the door (Mat. 6:6). In doing so, we shut out the world. It is a time of refuge from the dangers, anxieties, and pressures of the world. We contemplate things that are eternal and put the temporal in perspective.

Speaking with God in prayer is also a refuge where I can speak to speak my heart's innermost thoughts. Jesus instructed us not to use vain repetitions or already determined prayers. In prayer to our Father, we are not restricted by cold calculated prayers that we must recite with no freedom of choice. On the contrary, we can speak with God about things we could never discuss with another person. What a refuge!

Finally, we can take refuge from worry. We no longer have to worry about forgiveness and having our needs met (Mat. 6:11-12). In prayer, we trust God with the most important matters of life. Is it not a relief to know that we do not have to depend upon our own merit and work to provide these essentials spiritually ("forgive us") and physically ("daily bread")?

Relationship

Another benefit of prayer is that of a relationship. Jesus said we are to pray "our Father" (Mat. 6:9). The Jews were known to begin prayer with "O, Lord God of our Fathers" (McGarvey 63). Jesus shows us the more personal relationship we share with God in prayer. It is widely known that communication is one of the foundational elements to successful relationships of any kind. The same is true God. God communicates with us through His Word and we communicate with God through prayer. This is balanced communication and thus the relationship with our Father is strengthened.

Reward

The benefits of prayer continue with God's rewarding of those who pray. Again, Jesus said that the Father would reward openly those who pray (Mat. 6:6). God encouraged Jeremiah by saying, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (Jer. 33:3). We must always remember that God is able to do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). God answers prayer with rewards beyond our comprehension!

Relate

Finally, in prayer, we can know that God can relate to us. He understands our situation. Jesus informed us that the Father knows what we need before we ask (Matt. 6:8). God understands our emotions and already knows the solutions. He knows why we are approaching in prayer and how the situation will be resolved. Is it not difficult to feel like no one else understands your situation? What a comfort to know that God understands!

The purpose of this study was to try to build up each of us so that we would be actively involved in daily prayer. Jesus has instructed us mightily on the subject of prayer (Mat. 6:5-13). He has shown us the basics of prayer, the barriers to prayer, and the benefits of prayer. Now, let us follow the example of Jesus, by going to a solitary place and communing with our Father in prayer (Mark 1:35).

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CHAPTER 15

The Hands Of Barnabas: Encouraging Those Who Handle The Lord's Money

Michael McDaniel

My heartfelt appreciation is extended to the elders of the great Southaven congregation for their gracious invitation to speak once again on the Power Lectures. May God continue to bless this church and your two outstanding preachers, Wade Webster and Robert Jefferies, as they labor with you.

Brother Winfred Clark once wrote an article entitled, "A Good Man." He said, "We know that the Holy Spirit would not describe a person in this way if such were not the case." He referred to the fact that Barnabas is called "a good man" in Acts 11:24 (Clark 528). In a time of great racial prejudice, Barnabas was a good man who was equally trusted by both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Barnabas was a bridge builder. The apostles had rightly nicknamed him son of consolation or encouragement (Acts 4:36; KJV, NKJV). He built a bridge of encouragement and a highway of spiritual and material fellowship between Jerusalem and Antioch when it was desperately needed for the continued growth of the church. It was Barnabas who was chosen by the Jewish Christians

at Jerusalem to go on a mission of spiritual encouragement to Antioch (Acts 11:19-24; KJV). I can just imagine them hearing the story about Cypriot Christians having success in Antioch and realizing that Barnabas, as a trustworthy, Greek-speaking Christian from Cyprus, would be ideal for this situation. Here we have a case of the church at Jerusalem sending spiritual help to the church at Antioch by the hands of Barnabas. This is church cooperation in the areas of evangelism and edification.

In our assigned text of Acts 11:27-30, Barnabas would, once again, be sent on a mission. This time he and Paul would travel back to Jerusalem from Antioch with material aid to assist the brethren in Judea in a time of physical famine. This is church cooperation in the area of benevolence. Christian love was being reciprocated, and Barnabas was a facilitator in it!

Consider the following points from Acts 11:27-30: (1) The Declaration of the Disciples, (2) The Determination of the Disciples, (3) The Doing of the Disciples, and (4) The Decision of the Disciples.

The Declaration To The Disciples

“And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar” (Acts 11:27-28). Prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. It would appear that they came to forewarn their brethren of what would soon come to pass. Agabus prophesied of the famine that would occur in all the world. Notice that Agabus did not confine the famine to Judea. This means that people in Antioch would also suffer. Agabus was a prophet because he had the gift of prophecy,

one of the nine spiritual gifts imparted by the laying on of the apostle's hands (1 Cor. 12:10; Acts 8:18). He is mentioned again when he told Paul of the persecution that awaited him in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11). The famine he predicted would arrive in the days of Claudius. Several ancient writers such as Tacitus [Annals XI.43], Josephus [Antiquities XX.ii.5], and Suetonius [Claudius 18] affirm the occurrence of great famines in Israel around A.D. 44 to 46 (MacArthur 1456).

When the brethren in Antioch heard this prophecy, they believed there was a need. Don Dewelt commented, "Always the first to suffer in a famine were 'those of Judea.' The ground of the province of Judea was not productive enough to supply all the needs of the many who lived within its borders. This was true in natural times; what then would be their condition in a famine?" (156). In addition, even though the brethren in Antioch would also face the famine, they had not endured persecution as their brethren in Judea had. They had not lost their jobs or their homes. Brother Jerry Moffitt wrote, "The resources of the Jerusalem church may have been well expended already for they had supported many converts, and economic pressure at the home of the religion may have been most severe (Acts 4:34-35; Acts 8:1-4; Heb. 10:34) (171-72). Their brethren at Jerusalem had come to their spiritual aid in their time of need. They had sent forth Barnabas to help them. What should they do now?"

The Determination of The Disciples

In an act of sheer selflessness, they determined to send help. "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea" (Acts 11:29). J. W. McGarvey said, "The disciples in Antioch anticipate a state of distress yet in the future, on the part of brethren to whom they are personally unknown, and

provide for it in advance. No more striking evidence could be given, at once, of their benevolence, and their confidence in the predictions of their own prophets” (Original 151).

What if some of our brethren had been in that meeting? Someone might have said, “Now wait a minute, brethren. I know this is a good cause and our brethren in Judea will need the money, but what about us? Don’t we have a responsibility to our congregation here? That prophet Agabus didn’t say there was going to be great famine in Judea or Jerusalem. He said there was going to be a great famine in all the world. That includes us! We are going to need that money right here! Let’s just wait and see how bad it gets here and then if we have anything to spare, we will send it on to Judea.” If some selfish brethren had been in this business meeting, such is probably what would have happened. However, it is obvious that these brethren at Antioch felt indebted to the brethren at Jerusalem for the spiritual help they had received. They loved them and their love for their brethren moved them to this wonderful financial decision in the realm of benevolence.

Notice that the disciples at Antioch gave individually that they might give collectively. This reminds us that the responsibility to contribute toward the support of the church belongs to each citizen of the kingdom. Whether one is a businessman, a secretary, a retiree, or a teenager mowing yards or babysitting, the obligation to give, consistent with one’s prosperity, toward the work of the church is ever present. They gave proportionately, “every man according to his ability” (Acts 11:29). Amazingly some in the early church gave even beyond their ability (2 Cor. 8:3). This reminds me of First Corinthians 16:2, “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.” The Greek word rendered “in store” (thesaurizoon) is literally “put in the

treasury.” To give as we have prospered into the treasury each Lord’s Day is proportionate giving. One person’s prosperity compensates for the lack on the part of another, for the time may come when their circumstances could be reversed. “For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not” (2 Cor. 8:12).

Brethren, we should stress liberal, generous, proportionate giving to the church motivated by a heart of love. However, we tread on dangerous ground when we seek to bind Old Testament tithing on New Testament Christians, when we suggest that Christians must give 10% and that it is improper and unscriptural to give less than 10%. Friends, we must be careful not to make a New Testament law from an Old Testament practice (Gal. 5:4).

Under the Mosaic system, there was a treasury in the temple, which was there according to the pattern given by God (1 Chr. 28:1ff). This contained thirteen chests around the walls for Jewish contributions. Nine were for gifts required of the worshipers; the remaining four accommodated strictly voluntary gifts or free-will offerings (Eldersheim 48). As the antitype of the temple, the church also has a treasury. However, under the Christian dispensation, God selected the free-will offerings for our treasury rather than the tithes because they are given not of necessity (2 Cor. 9:7), but of love. Worship may be described as an expression of awe, devotion, and love from man, the creature, to God his Creator. One aspect of worship includes the presentation of gifts. When the Philippian saints gave their money for the support of Paul, God viewed it as “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God” (Phi. 4:18). Many are surprised to learn that there is not a single, solitary New Testament passage that suggests the “tithes” as a standard

for Christian giving today. Rather, certain principles are set forth which instruct and challenge the child of God to give in a manner that is spiritually superior to Judaism. Foy E. Wallace Jr. wrote,

In the Second Corinthians letter Paul devotes two consecutive chapters to the subject of giving. He talks in terms of “abounding in the grace of giving”; “readiness to will”; “a willing mind”; “it is acceptable according as a man hath”; and “as God hath prospered”—all these and more, yet not a word of tithing . . . Tithing belongs to the letter and legalism of the old system and not to the spirit and freedom of the new. The new is better, and it is not tithe or tax, but voluntary, liberal, cheerful giving; and God will judge the giver. (342-43)

Brother H. Leo Boles was asked this question, “Would it be safe to teach the people that God requires a tenth?” He replied, “No. It is never safe to teach the people anything that God does not teach them. Nowhere in the New Testament Scriptures are we taught that God ‘requires a tenth’ of his people. They should be encouraged toward liberality, but should not be taught that God requires any specified amount” (Boles 41-42).

Giving is the proof of our love. In Barnabas, the disciples at Antioch had a teacher who not only taught such, but also had a visible record of practicing it. He had given of his property earlier in order to help those in need (Acts 4:36-37). He had given of himself in service to the brethren at

Antioch. That kind of giving spirit is contagious. Were they not emulating the kind of selflessness they had seen in the Barnabas' example?

The Doing of the Disciples

“Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:30). They did what they determined to do. They made good on their promise. They not only talked about it; they did it! How often do we say and do not (Mat. 23:3)? Are we like Balaam? Balaam expressed his good intentions in Numbers 23:10, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” He also said unto Balak’s servants, “If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more” (Num. 22:18). What if Balaam had been in the meeting at Antioch? Would the plan have been carried out? Would he have influenced them to “exercise their heart with covetous practices”? Peter warned of those, “Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet. 2:15). It is just as wrong to covet money in the church bank account as it is to covet money yet to be received. Is it the case that we often refuse to help people that need our help due to our own covetousness? “He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse” (Pro. 28:27).

Perhaps we fail to carry out our good intentions to help due to neglect or forgetfulness. The idea may enter our minds, and we may discuss it in a business meeting, yet never do one thing about it! “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and

seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:16-18). These disciples at Antioch loved in deed. A preacher told of the death of his father. He said, “I remember a lady who was a distant relative of our family. She drove six hours to get to the funeral. She walked in the house and went immediately into the kitchen and began washing dishes. I didn’t even know she was there. She straightened up everything and helped prepare for the meal. She came to the funeral. After the funeral, she came back and did the dishes again, got in her car and went home. As far as I know, she never said a word. She never introduced herself, but when I looked around, I realized that **love had been in our house.**” She loved in deed and in truth, and so must we.

As it pertains to benevolence, Galatians 6:10 instructs, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” Paul said in 2 Corinthians 9:13, “Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men.” Could the elders at Jerusalem have proceeded to use this relief in the help of their brethren and to assist non-Christians as well as they had resources and opportunity? In 1967 in Corinth, Mississippi, Eural Bingham affirmed the following proposition in a debate with Alan Highers: “The Scriptures teach that in benevolence, Churches of Christ may relieve saints only.” Brother Highers rightly denied that proposition. Since this aid was going to the brethren in Judea and specifically to the elders to be disbursed, would it have been wrong to have aided some non-Christians in addition to the brethren?

I cannot think of anything which the church is authorized to do which is not motivated by love. Such is certainly true of benevolence. Some of the Jews taught that you should love your neighbor and hate your enemy. By neighbor, they meant Jews. They meant their brethren only. Jesus had to meet this idea head on before the church ever started or before the kingdom was ever begun by laying down the principles that should govern His kingdom and His people.

Ye have heard that it hath been said,
Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate
thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love
your enemies, bless them that curse you,
do good to them that hate you, and pray
for them which despitefully use you, and
persecute you; That ye may be the children
of your Father which is in heaven: for he
maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on
the good, and sendeth rain on the just
and on the unjust. For if ye love them
which love you, what reward have ye? do
not even the publicans the same? And
if ye salute your brethren only, what do
ye more than others? do not even the
publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect,
even as your Father which is in heaven is
perfect. (Mat. 5:43-48)

Friends, here is a “brethren only” passage. Yet it condemns the doctrine of “saints only” instead of supporting it. Jesus told them you cannot just “love” your neighbor. You must love and do good to your enemies. He says you must do this to be God’s children because if you do not, you

are not practicing God's love. God's law of love extends to all men. Now here is a pertinent question: *Can the church practice God's love?* The clear implication of the "saints only" doctrine is that the church cannot help anyone who not a member of the church out of the church treasury.

Who is willing to say that God's law of love does not apply to the church? Can the church practice God's love? Certainly so! (Gal. 6:10; 2 Cor. 9:13). Yet, this doctrine teaches that individuals can be Godlike in showing love from their wallets, but the church **cannot** from its treasury! This doctrine makes the church practice love like the Publicans—the very thing Jesus condemned in Matthew 5:43-48! If we are to be sons of God in the church of God, then we are going to have to practice God's law of love which involves doing good to the unjust as well as to the just.

We must also increase in the kind of love which the church at Thessalonica practiced. To the church at Thessalonica, Paul wrote, "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you" (1 The. 3:12). The good brethren at Thessalonica loved each other and had an interest in the welfare of all men. He exhorted them to increase in these qualities. Love is known by the action it inspires (1 Cor. 13). It is not merely sentiment. Love needs to be shown and demonstrated to our brethren. But is it just to be displayed to our brethren *only*? No. It is not saints only that we are to love and help. That kind of love is to be extended toward *all men*. We are to love and help everybody as far as opportunity, need, and ability is concerned, and there is a special love and care among those who are Christians (Gal. 6:10). Yet the "saints only" doctrine says the church cannot increase in the love which the church at Thessalonica practiced.

The Decision of the Disciples

After Barnabas and Paul had spent “a whole year” (43 A. D.) edifying the Antioch congregation (Acts 11:26), the disciples of Jesus, newly named *Christians*, asked Barnabas and Paul to carry a gift of money to those in need some 300 miles away in Judea (Acts 11:30). J. W. McGarvey wrote, “Barnabas and Saul could well afford to suspend for a few weeks their work of preaching and teaching for the purpose of promoting a benevolent enterprise such as the world had seldom or never witnessed before. There is no preaching so eloquent as that which sounds out from whole-hearted benevolence” (New 230). With that service completed, they returned from Jerusalem to Antioch, and took with them John Mark, the relative of Barnabas (Acts 12:25; Col. 4:10).

The Decision Of The Disciples Reveals The Trust They Had In Barnabas and Saul.

Why would they want this contribution to be placed in the hands of Barnabas and Saul? These men had shown their trustworthiness and interest in the poor. Earlier, Barnabas acted as a sacrificial giver to the poor in selling his land in Cyprus and laying it at the Apostles’ feet (Acts 4:36-37). He had stood in sharp contrast to Ananias and Sapphira, who wanted to be known for their generosity but were too greedy to give the amount they claimed (Acts 5). Paul was of the same mind as Barnabas. In Acts 20:33-35, he told the Ephesian elders at Miletus, “I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” He also wrote in Galatians 2:10, “Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also

was forward to do.” These two Christians had been Jews from Gentile regions. Barnabas was from Cyprus while Paul was from Tarsus. They were ideal for the task at hand.

You would not want to place this contribution in the hands of someone like Judas. Would you want to send this contribution by the hand of someone who was controlled by greed? When Mary anointed Jesus with the spikenard, he professed sympathy for the poor. “Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein” (John 12:5-6). He was lying and stealing from money that was collected by the Lord. Eventually his greed caused him to betray the Lord for thirty pieces of silver (Mat. 26:14-15). The love of money has destroyed many people. Judas Iscariot is an example of how far one will go to have it. They will crucify the Son of God for \$20 dollars! Certainly, Judas was not the last one to mishandle the Lord’s money!

In 2009 in Indiana, a thirty-seven year old woman, who was serving as a church’s financial and administrative secretary since 2004, was arrested for stealing more than \$350,000 from that church. She forged signatures on 192 checks, doctored bank receipts to cover it up, and also made unauthorized charges on church credit cards. The woman was convicted on six counts of Class C felony charges and six counts of Class D felony theft, resulting in ten years in the state prison, followed by five years of probation.

In the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners Report to the Nations in 2012, it was reported that 10.4% of cases occur in not-for-profit organizations with an average theft amount of at least \$100,000 stolen over a period of several years. Often the thief had no prior criminal record. Personal debt, a medical crisis, or the unexpected loss of a spouse’s

job created unexpected pressure, with many rationalizing their acts as “temporary loans” that they intended to repay—but never did. Some believed that they were underpaid and “owed” additional compensation (Branough).

These matters should remind church leaders to consistently evaluate the financial support of staff members and try to set fair ranges of pay and benefits (1 Tim. 5:18) and be watchful for heavy financial pressures in their lives. Cases of embezzlement should be turned over to the police or the IRS. However, what should you do if a person confesses to having embezzled the Lord’s money? First, you should be willing to forgive the person. Second, you should immediately remove that person from access to any of the church’s funds. Third, you should try to discover exactly how much money has been taken. You may need to engage a local CPA to do an audit. Fourth, as stewards of the Lord’s money, you should demand that the penitent embezzler make full restitution of the funds within a specified period of time. If the embezzler refuses or insists he cannot repay the funds or fails to do so, the church may choose to issue him or her a 1099 or a corrected W-2 if they are an employee reporting the embezzled funds as taxable income. Failure to report to the IRS could cause the church to be punished.

The Decision Of The Disciples Reveals There Is Safety In Numbers.

You may trust someone to handle the church’s money and later find out that your trust was sadly misplaced. The first thing said by most members after someone has embezzled money from the church is “We trusted them!” Internal controls should be established which safeguard the collecting, counting, depositing, and accounting of the money as well as check-writing and bill-paying. Segregating

duties and involving multiple people in these various areas adds layers of protection.

The Decision Of The Disciples Reveals The Need To Guard Our Influence As Well As The Church's Money.

Paul wrote in Romans 12:17 to “provide things honest in the sight of all men.” Sending two messengers would facilitate this. The same practice was utilized by Paul later in the contribution that Paul collected among the churches. Paul encouraged the churches to designate men who would accompany the collection. “And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem” (1 Cor. 16:3). Acts 20:4 gives the following list. “And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus.” Why was such done? Paul mentions two reasons. First, he says in Second Corinthians 8:20, “Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us.” Thus, he says that he did it to avoid anyone blaming him or charging him with mishandling the contribution for the saints. In addition, he adds this principle: “providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Cor. 8:21). Paul sought not only to do right, but also to appear right in the sight of all men. He was concerned about what others thought about him and desired to guard his influence. Friends, if the apostle Paul would go to such measures to ensure that his brethren would be assured concerning the honest and proper handing of these contributions, should not elders also be willing to take measures like monthly financial reports so that brethren are reassured? While most elders and church treasurers are honest, a regular financial report not only removes all temptations to misuse funds, but it keeps

the congregation from ever entertaining any doubt regarding the integrity of the elders or the treasurer. The funds of the church are to be used for the work of the church which God has authorized: evangelism, edification, and benevolence. It is in the best interest of a congregation and of an eldership for there to be printed, regular, financial reports. While most churches now make regular financial reports, there are still some who do not. Monthly financial reports help to prevent the misuse of church funds. They are an expedient way to help guard our influence.

The Decision Of The Disciples Reveals The Practice Of Church Cooperation.

In order to send relief to the brethren that dwelt in Judea, they sent the money to the elders. The elders would be charged with distributing the money according to the needs of the receivers just as it had been contributed according to the ability of the givers. This raises a question. Did Saul and Barnabas take the money from Antioch and go to each congregation of brethren in Judea and give each one a part of it? Or did they go to the elders of the church in Jerusalem and deliver the money and allow them to disburse it among the brethren in that area? Commentators are divided on this issue. We simply are not told these details. Yet, some have argued an exclusive pattern in benevolence that must be followed from this very passage. They claim that when the need was benevolence, support was sent to the elders. However, when the need was evangelism and they cooperated in the work of evangelism, they sent it directly to the preacher. They claim that these are two exclusive patterns. For their benevolence pattern, they teach that the relief went directly to the elders of congregations scattered throughout Judea, and that the elders of Jerusalem would not have been permitted to distribute the funds to them. Yet, they assume

that the churches of Judea had elders at this time and that “the elders” refers to the elders of all the churches of Judea and not just to the elders of the church at Jerusalem. This they cannot prove.

The possibility exists that the elders referred to are the elders of the church at Jerusalem for several reasons. First, the fact that the prophet Agabus and others had come from Jerusalem (Acts 11:27) and that initially Barnabas had been sent to Antioch from Jerusalem (Acts 11:22) may indicate contextually that the relief was going back to Jerusalem. Second, Acts 11:30 is the first mention of elders by Luke in Acts. Later, it is mentioned that the church at Jerusalem had elders (Acts 15:2). Wayne Jackson wrote, “The definite article seems to suggest a specific group of elders, and the most reasonable view is that these were the elders of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:25)” (225). Third, at the end of their benevolent mission, “Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem” (Acts 12:25). To return from Jerusalem, they obviously went to Jerusalem. Fourth, Barnabas and Saul picked up John Mark (Acts 12:25). John Mark was from Jerusalem and when he left them, he returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Fourth, Paul mentioned the churches of Christ in Judea and said in Galatians 1:22-23, “And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ: But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.” If Barnabas and Saul had taken the relief to the elders of the churches of Christ throughout Judea, then he would have been known by face to them. The tense of the verb “was unknown” is in a form (imperfect periphrastic) that Lenski says suggests continuation—“continuing unknown” (64). Paul remained unknown to the churches of Judea until the events of Galatians chapter two transpired, which corresponds

with Acts chapter fifteen. J. W. Roberts wrote, “This makes it almost morally certain that Paul’s trip in Acts 11:30 did not involve him in visits where he would be brought face to face with all the Judean churches. So it powerfully argues that the trip of Acts 11:30 involved only a trip to Jerusalem to the elders there” (137).

The disciples sent the money “by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.” A church may act “through the hand of” a number of men. This expression (*dia cheiros*) is the same expression that occurs in Acts 15:23 where one church wrote to another church and is translated *by them* (Warren 78). Whereas its usage in Acts 11 pertains to benevolence, its usage in Acts 15 pertains to edification. Interestingly, Ralph Gentry points out that those brethren pushing their “exclusive bound patterns” do not seem to have one relative to edification. Would funds by a sending congregation for edification go directly to the preacher as per their “evangelism pattern” or to the elders as per their “benevolence pattern”? Often it is argued that this is included in the “evangelism pattern.” Such circumvents the elders and gives the preacher working funds that he might assume an evangelistic oversight in that work which is unscriptural (Gentry 4).¹

Concerning Acts 15:23, Perry B. Cotham wrote, “The letter and the brethren who were sent were to assist Paul and Barnabas in more effectively teaching the truth concerning the trouble which Judaizing brethren had caused; in this way the church was edified. The Bible further states: ‘And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them’ (Acts 15:32). This was spiritual edification” (18). In Acts 11, you have physical needs being supplied by one congregation for the Judean region and sent to elders through the hands of two men. In Acts 15, you have spiritual needs being supplied

by the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:22) for the Gentiles and sent to the church at Antioch through the hands of a number of men. This was church cooperation in the realm of edification. Since this is the case, must we send support to another congregation only through the hands of men? Roy Lanier, Sr. said, “The money was carried by two brethren to the churches in need. Is this part of the binding pattern? Must there be two messengers for one church? Can we now use Uncle Sam to do this work for us?” (237). Gus Nichols wrote,

Anti-orphan home brethren say this is an unalterable example bound upon us. Then they alter or change it, and say we may send the contribution to a foreign church by check instead of by two men, as in the case before us (Acts 11:29-30) . . . As we have seen, everything the churches did with approval is not bound upon us. Their examples in carrying out details under generic authority was optional with them, and could not have become binding on us! We may, therefore, send by check, or by men. (Thomas 233)

E. R. Harper wrote, “[T]hey have all confused the ‘incidentals’ in carrying out God’s commands with the ‘essentials.’ Ways and methods are ‘incidentals’ and cannot be formed into a ‘set, bound pattern’ for all generations. God’s commands; His ‘bound patterns’ cannot be changed but the ‘incidentals—the ways and methods’ of carrying out His commands may and have been varied” (Harper 15). There is no single exclusive pattern in the matter of a church helping

another church. The Bible teaches church cooperation in the work of evangelism, edification, and benevolence, and we are authorized to utilize expedient means as we work together for the cause of the Lord.

Some brethren have claimed that a congregation would lose their autonomy if they sent money to another congregation for the preaching of the gospel. The fact that funds were transferred from one congregation to another to aid in the work of benevolence proves that such is not the case. When the church at Antioch sent this money to the brethren in Judea, they did not lose their autonomy in doing so. The autonomy of neither church was violated. It was not the case that a congregation in Judea had control over funds that belonged to a congregation in Antioch. If it did not violate autonomy in benevolence, then it would not violate autonomy in evangelism or edification either! In 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, we read of how the church in Macedonia sent funds to the church in Judea. They did not lose their autonomy in doing so. Church A (a sending church) contributes to church B (a receiving church). The elders of A retain oversight of a contribution until it is given to B. There is no overlapping of authority at any time. As Bill Threat wrote,

For a church to lose its autonomy, it would have to lose its power of decision. Although churches may cooperate in any phase of the mission of the Lord's church, they cannot organize into something larger or smaller than the local church. It is not correct to teach if one church sends a contribution to another church, as Biblical practice shows, the receiving church 'takes over' the sending church.

Whatever number of churches may be necessary to accomplish the work may cooperate, and in such procedures there would be no interference with the independence of any local church. Therefore, while churches of Christ are cooperating with one another, they can and must maintain their independence and autonomy. (411)

Elders do not lose their autonomy when they send funds to a church, a preacher, or orphan's home. No church should try to bind upon the brotherhood that which God has loosed or left as a matter of expediency. To do so is to fail to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3-6).

Bobby Liddell has well stated,

An important point to remember is this: congregations have the right to choose to cooperate with others, and in what ways to cooperate, and do not have to submit to demands, or commands, of other congregations or elderships concerning what works they will support. Local exercise of judgment and congregational autonomy must be preserved. When a church decides not to cooperate in a scriptural work designed to save souls, it should not impose its decision upon others, or make a law that others sin if they do cooperate—doing the work of the church. (1)

While autonomy is to be preserved, cooperation is also to be present. Early congregations of the Lord's church did not isolate themselves from each other, and they were not lacking in true and genuine interest in each other and concern for the brotherhood (1 Pet. 2:17). Barnabas is one of the greatest examples of love for the brotherhood that exists within the Scriptures! Such love for God, for the church, and for those in need needs to be emulated by us today in our giving and in our handling of the Lord's money.

Notes

1. For a great discussion of the Philippian church's role in overseeing Paul's funds, see Roy Deaver's "An Update On Anti-ism." in *The Living And Abiding Word*. Henderson: Freed-Hardeman College. 1979.

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CHAPTER 16

Turning To The Gentiles: The Encouragement That Can Come From Turning To Other Cultures

Willie Alvarenga

What a great joy it is to assemble together to study the Word of God. What a blessing it is to study God's Word through several faithful gospel preachers who remain loyal to the oracles of God and sound doctrine (1 Pet. 4:11; Tit. 2:1; ASV). I am thankful to God for giving me this privilege of preaching His Word during the Power Lectures. I have always admired the great work this congregation does and I commend the elders and the ministers for the great work you do in the kingdom. I thank the elders and Wade Webster for the invitation to be part of this great lectureship. What a great joy it is to be together with brothers and sisters of like precious faith (2 Pet. 1:1). It is my prayer that the things we will study throughout this week will help us to be better servants in the kingdom.

A great topic has been assigned to me entitled, "*Turning to the Gentiles: The Encouragement that Can Come from Turning to Other Cultures.*" The purpose of this lesson is to encourage the Lord's people to extend their vision of preaching the gospel, not only to those of our own language,

but also to those of other cultures. We live in a country that is composed of people who speak other languages. We as Christians have a great responsibility of reaching out to them as well. The Bible teaches that “God desires for all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). The phrase *all men* refers to Jews and Gentiles, that is, to everyone in general. The Apostle Peter also tells us that God does “not wish[ing] that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Therefore, as we examine this lesson, let me encourage each and every one of us to be “doers of God’s Word and not hearers only” (Jam. 1:22). May we remember the blessings that come our way when we practice what the Word of God teaches us (Luke 11:28; Jam. 1:25).

In the next few minutes, I want to direct your minds to the subject of evangelism and the great responsibility that each of us has to share the good news of salvation with other cultures. Therefore, let us consider in this lesson the following points: Our command to preach the gospel of Christ, the need to share the good news of salvation, the encouragement that can come from preaching the gospel to other cultures, and, finally, let us examine some practical ways of how you and I can share the gospel of Christ to other cultures.

The Command To Preach The Gospel To The Whole World

Brothers and sisters, it is imperative that we remember at all times the great command we have to preach the gospel of Christ to the world. The New Testament is very clear concerning this command. The Lord Jesus Christ gave this command to His Apostles in Mat. 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-16. Logic demands that we reason correctly about this command and to recognize that it also applies to us all. Each

member of the body of Christ has the obligation to preach the gospel to as many people as possible. The verb *preach* in Mark 16:15 is found in the imperative mood, which reveals a command to follow. Sadly to say, there are those in the Body of Christ who believe the command to preach the gospel only applies to the preacher and not to the members of the church. Some have come to the point saying, “That is why we pay our preacher.” An examination of Acts 8:1-4 reveals that the responsibility of preaching the gospel belongs to the preacher and to each member of the Body of Christ. In this context we see Christian going everywhere preaching the Word of God (Acts 8:4). Johnny Ramsey used to say that the early church went everywhere preaching the Word, but the church of today does not go anywhere preaching the Word. Why, you may ask? The reason: Some think this is the responsibility of the preacher only. Brothers and sisters, this is not right! We must be obedient to the command of preaching the gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world. Jesus Christ said, “If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Have we taken the Great Commission seriously in our congregations? Are we, individually speaking, reaching out to the lost? In order for us to take the Great Commission seriously, we must have a love for the souls of this world. We must have the kind of attitude that the Apostle Paul had. Notice what he wrote to the saints at Rome, “I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also that are in Rome” (Rom. 1:14-15). Unless we have this attitude in our hearts, we will never share the gospel of Christ with the lost. The life the Apostle Paul lived is a great source of encouragement for you and for me who desire to preach the gospel to the lost. Paul was able to preach the gospel in many places (Rom. 15:19; Col. 1:6). Why? The

answer is simple: He took the Great Commission seriously, and so must we!

The Great Need To Share The Gospel

Let us remember that people are lost without the gospel. The Apostle Paul tells us that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). The gospel is the only solution to the sin problem. There is a great need for us to preach the good news of salvation to the whole world. People of every culture in this world have a soul that needs saving. It is imperative that we acknowledge that sin affects everyone in this world. The Apostle Paul wrote to the saints at Rome that everyone within the age of accountability was guilty of sin and stood in need of the gospel (Rom. 3:9-10; Rom. 6:23). During the early century, Jews and Gentiles needed to obey the gospel of Christ. Paul establishes the fact that Gentiles are lost and stand in need of the gospel (Rom. 1). He also establishes the fact that even Jews are lost and need to obey the gospel as well (Rom. 2). In Romans chapter 3, he establishes the truth that “all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Friends, nothing has changed today! People of every country need the gospel today more than ever. Sin is a universal problem that affects everyone. Thankfully, God has the solution to the sin problem. You and I can teach the gospel of Christ, the power of God unto salvation, to every person we come in contact with. People of every nation are dying in this world every single minute. It is imperative that we acknowledge this; otherwise, people will continue to die without the saving message of Jesus Christ.

Christians today need to put aside every bit of favoritism and begin to share the gospel of Christ with those who do not look like or speak like we do. There are those Christians

who would not even consider the possibility of preaching the gospel to other cultures. This was the mentality that the Jewish people had in the first century. On a certain occasion, Jesus Christ was willing to go through Samaria in order that He may preach the Word of God to the Samaritans (John 4). He ended up staying two days with them. Can you imagine that? Jesus Christ held a two-day gospel meeting in Samaria! I am pretty sure that the Apostles were not very comfortable with that; nevertheless, they still followed the Savior and were willing to spend a few days in Samaria. We must be willing to preach the gospel of Christ to everyone. Other cultures need the gospel, too! The Apostle Paul acknowledged this truth and this is why he was willing to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

We must remember that God desires the salvation of every single person in this world. There are several passages that reveal the divine desire of God to save all men. Please take the time to read the following passages: Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; Titus 2:11; Ezekiel 33:11; and John 3:16. Each of these passages includes people of other cultures. This is something that you and I must understand. I am thankful to God for those faithful brethren who have taken the time to travel to other countries to teach the gospel. I am thankful for brethren who take the time to learn another language so they can preach the good news of salvation to others (e.g. Russian, Spanish, Swahili, Telegu, Chinese, Korean, etc.). We are thankful to God for those congregations who support missionaries across the world. We are thankful to those congregations who are willing to let our Spanish brethren use their facilities so they can have their worship services in their own language. I am thankful to the Gospel Broadcasting Network for contacting me about material to teach others the gospel in Spanish. We

are thankful for the House to House publication in English as well as in Spanish. Many have benefitted from their sound material. We are thankful to the brethren who work at Apologetics Press and for their sound material in Spanish. We thank Moises Pinedo for taking the time to translate articles from English to Spanish so many can be taught the Word of God. Friends, we are thankful to God for all of these avenues we can use to teach the Gospel in English as well as in Spanish. We are thankful to those faithful gospel preachers who give us permission to translate some of their material into the Spanish language.

I am thankful to God for the opportunity to be able to speak two languages. This provides me the blessing of being able to preach the gospel of Christ in most parts of the world. I truly enjoy the opportunities to preach lessons bilingually. I have had the blessing of preaching for several gospel meetings where I get to preach bilingual lessons. If you have the opportunity to learn another language, please consider doing so. You will be able to reach out to more people by speaking in other languages. If you are a gospel preacher and cannot learn another language, at least try to have someone translate lessons for you. Thank God for those faithful brethren who are willing to translate God's Word.

I am thankful to God for the Brown Trail School of Preaching Spanish department. For 9 years we have been training students in their own language so they can preach the gospel and sound doctrine in Mexico, Costa Rica, and many other Spanish-speaking countries. The same courses that each student studies in the English department are the ones that all of the students in the Spanish department study. We thank our supporters for helping Spanish students receive their training at Brown Trail. We thank congregations

who call the school to ask for preachers who can evangelize in Spanish the community where the church meets. Some of our students are bilingual and can preach the saving message in English as well as in Spanish. We also offer a course in English to those who do not speak the language so we can help those who come from another country learn some things about the language that can assist them in trying to teach others also. When we go on door-knocking campaigns, it is interesting to see how the students from the Spanish department who do not speak the English language struggle to teach others the gospel. They, at least, make the effort to tell others about Christ. There is a great lesson we can learn here!

The Encouragement Of Preaching The Gospel To Other Cultures

What type of encouragement do we get for preaching the gospel to other cultures? Brothers and sisters, the encouragement is great. Therefore, let me encourage each and every one of us to please consider the following:

There Is Encouragement In Knowing That Other Cultures Can Receive Forgiveness Of Sins

We know that forgiveness of sins only comes through obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we teach them the gospel and they obey it, then they are baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). Remission of sins is necessary in order to be able to see God one day (cf. Mat. 5:8; Heb. 12:14). We can help people receive the forgiveness of their sins by teaching them the gospel of Christ. People today can be justified before God through an obedient faith in Him (Rom. 3:28; Rom. 5:1). They can be justified just like the Gentiles did in the early century, through an obedient faith.

There Is Encouragement In Knowing That Other Cultures Can Be Added To The Body Of Christ

It is a great blessing to be members of the Body of Christ! You and I can help other cultures experience this same blessing. Let us teach them that when they obey the gospel of Christ, they can be added to the Body of the Son of God (Acts 2:22-47). They can become members of the one true church of the Bible. Obedience to baptism is what puts people into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-4). Once they are in Christ, they will begin to enjoy all the spiritual blessings found in Him (Eph. 1:3). Therefore, teach them this great truth!

There Is Encouragement In Knowing That Other Cultures Can Have An Opportunity To Be Reconciled Back To God

The reality of sin in man is what keeps him separated from God (Isa. 59:1-2). The only solution to the sin problem is Jesus Christ and His gospel (cf. Rom. 6:23). Other cultures need to learn that reconciliation is found only in Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 2:13-16; Rom. 5:10). Other cultures can become part of the family of God by being reconciled to Him (Eph. 2:19). You and I can help other cultures learn what they must do in order to enjoy reconciliation in Christ.

There Is Encouragement In Knowing That Other Cultures Can Experience A New Life In Christ

Through the preaching of the gospel to other cultures, we can help them experience a new life in Christ. We will teach them about the gospel that can help them to be born again of water and the Spirit (John 3:3; John 3:5). Once they are baptized into Christ, they will begin to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4; 2 Cor. 5:17). They will experience a great change in their lives, a change like the one the Corinthians experienced (1 Cor. 6:9-11), or a change like the one the Apostle Paul experienced (Acts 9; Acts 22; Acts 26).

There Is Encouragement In Knowing That Other Cultures Can Enjoy The Opportunity To Worship God In Spirit And In Truth

The only way to worship the Creator of heaven and earth acceptably is by being in the Body of Christ. Only these are the ones who are authorized to worship in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:23-24; Eph. 3:20-21). The Apostle Peter made a great statement when he was preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Notice what he said, "And Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him (Acts 10:34-35). Only those who are faithful to the commandments of God are qualified to worship God acceptably. We can bring more people to God who will give Him the honor and glory He deserves. We can be the means by which other cultures can forsake paganism in order to come and worship the living God. The saints at Thessalonica forsook their idols so they can worship God (cf. 1 The. 1:9-10). They did this because of the preaching of the gospel through the Apostle Paul.

There Is Encouragement In Knowing That Other Cultures Can Enjoy The Hope Of Eternal Life

We need to teach other cultures what they must do in order to enjoy the hope of eternal life (Heb. 5:8-9). Let us teach them that by being baptized into Christ is the means by which they can have the hope of eternal life. They need to know that this hope is found in Jesus (cf. 1 John 5:11-13; John 11:25-26). The Bible teaches that eternal salvation is found only in Jesus Christ (John 10:9; Acts 4:12). We can help people get into Christ by teaching them the gospel. Once they obey it, they will begin to enjoy this great hope of eternal life.

Various Means To Share The Gospel With Other Cultures

How can you and I reach out to other cultures with the gospel of Christ? What are some of the things that we can consider to accomplish the preaching of the gospel? Let me invite you to please consider the following:

Try To Learn Another Language If Possible

We have several gospel preachers who have taken the time to learn the Spanish language as well as other languages. They had the desire to do mission work in other countries and so they went to a school to learn the language. Some of them learned so well that they were able to preach in that particular language. If you have the opportunity to learn, please consider doing so. It is a great joy being bilingual because you can teach the gospel of Christ on both sides of the world!

When Possible, Try To Give Away Tracts That Teach About The Gospel And The Church To Other Cultures

We have several tracts in Spanish that have been written by faithful gospel preachers. We also have tracts that have been translated into other languages. We can purchase these tracts and pass them out to our friends from other cultures. Some of your friends may accept them, while others will not. We are thankful for ministries such as House to House, Worldwide Spanish Literature Ministry, Mission Printing, and many more that have translated several tracts into other languages. Let us be good stewards of these means by which we can teach others the gospel.

Support Ministries That Advance The Teaching Of The Gospel To Other Cultures

We are blessed to have several ministries that advance the teaching of the gospel to other cultures. The ministries mentioned before, as well as Apologetics Press, World Video Bible School, the Gospel of Christ and others need our

support so they can continue to produce sound material that will teach people the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to consider supporting these ministries, as well as take advantage of the various literatures they have.

Support Sound Preaching Schools That Are Involved In Preaching The Gospel To Other Cultures

You and I know how much need we have for sound schools of preaching to be in existence. Jesus once said, “The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few” (Mat. 9:37); therefore, we will always stand in need of sound preaching schools who will train faithful gospel preachers, who will reach out to a lost and dying world. We have several sound schools today that are making a difference around the world. *The World Missions Program* of the Memphis School of Preaching is and will continue to be a great way to reach out to the world. In this school, we also have several Spanish-speaking students who received their training there, and who are making a difference teaching other cultures the gospel of Christ. The Brown Trail School of Preaching Spanish department will also make a difference by training gospel preachers in their own language. Graduates from these schools are teaching the gospel to as many people as possible. Let us keep them in our prayers.

If Possible, Begin A Spanish Ministry In Your Local Congregation

There are several congregations in the United States that have started a Spanish ministry in their local congregation. After my graduation from Brown Trail School of Preaching, I went to work for an English-speaking congregation who had a Spanish work within their facilities. I was able to work together with the leadership as well as the members from both congregations. There were times when we had several bilingual services together. It was indeed a great experience

being together to worship our heavenly Father! The congregation may consider hiring a bilingual preacher who has graduated from a sound preaching school. This way they can know for sure that the doctrine that will be taught to the Spanish brethren will be sound. There are several preaching schools that are graduating bilingual preachers.

Recommend Sound Websites Where Other Cultures Can Learn About The Word of God

With the use of the internet, we have come to a point in which we have a lot of written material that can teach the gospel to other cultures. Let us be familiar with these websites and recommend them to our friends. My personal website is www.regresandoalabiblia.com (backtothebible). On this website you can find a lot of Spanish material that has been written by me. There is also a Bible correspondence course that I wrote, and that you can use to teach Spanish-speaking friends the gospel of Christ. There is also the www.house-to-house.com website and www.enfoquebiblico.com. These are great avenues to teach people the gospel of Christ. Let us take the time to recommend these websites. Personally, I get emails from people all over the world that have benefitted from the material that I have written. Let us make good use of the technology we have to teach others the gospel of Christ.

Conclusion

Preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to other cultures is a command from God for His church. This task will produce great encouragement in our lives. Therefore, let us be doers of God's Word and not hearers only. Let us reach out to as many people as possible with the saving message of Christ. May the Lord give us the wisdom and the strength to carry out this noble task of helping others get to heaven. Always remember that God would have all men to be saved and to

come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). To God be the glory in everything we do, especially in preaching the gospel to the world.

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CHAPTER 17

Encouraging Brethren To Practice Church Discipline

Paul Sain

Joe and Jane Smith (obviously fictitious) obeyed the Gospel several years ago. Their home was blessed with two children. They served the Lord faithfully, were faithful in attendance, served as Bible class teachers, and were involved in various projects and works of the church, but then, tragedy struck their home. Joe became attracted to a secretary where he was employed. She was kind, considerate, and listened to Joe's problems. Attraction soon developed into a sexual relationship. Jane found the obvious signs (love notes, lipstick on the collar, etc.) and confronted Joe. After his initial denial, finally the truth came flooding out. Joe declared his "love" for his new sexual mate and refused to give her up. Jane and the children's world were shattered. Divorce resulted.

The elders of the church where the Smith family worshiped took a "hands-off" approach. They did not want to bring even more attention and hurt to their explosive home life. Since Joe had cut all ties with the church, now worshipping with a denominational group, the elders decided there was no "fellowship" that could be withdrawn—thus no action resulted.

WHY We Should NOT Practice Church Discipline

Personal feelings are often strong FOR and AGAINST any type of discipline. For far too long, many have felt church discipline involved an unloving action of “kicking someone out of the church.” Thus various conclusions have developed as to reasons (excuses) why we should NOT practice church discipline. These include:

“We don’t want to upset anyone. Disciplinary action would cause division. Families would be torn apart.”

Oftentimes we are just afraid to take action because of the possible consequences. We may remember the lawsuit of years past and we are walking on eggshells fearing such might happen to us. Or we fear that the community might feel we are unloving and judgmental. It is evident that avoidance is not the proper course of action.

“We are not to judge one another and church discipline violates that principle.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. First, we are required to judge (John 7:24; KJV). We are to judge a tree by its fruit (Mat. 7:16-20). Paul judged, and we must judge and reject a heretic (Tit. 3:10-11). John judged Diotrephes (3 John 9-10). Judgment is required to know if a doctrine is of God (1 John 4:1). How can we mark someone who causes division unless we judge them (Rom. 16:17). Second, church discipline is not a violation but a command of our Lord, through His inspired Word.

“We may not have all the facts.”

That is likely true, but it should not prevent submission to a specific command from God’s Word. There may be extenuating circumstances, others possibly were involved or did things just as sinful, but once again the emphasis must be on following the instruction of our Lord. Get the facts. Lovingly pursue the right course of soul-retrieving.

“But he/she has already withdrawn himself from the church.”

While it is obviously accurate that a person may no longer be in attendance, no longer involved in worshiping and serving the Lord, it is still imperative that we seek to restore such a one in a spirit of meekness (Gal. 6:1). The very fact that he/she is NOT living as the Christian life demands is PROOF that action to bring them back is urgent. An additional fact worthy of note: since many would be in a condition of “having already withdrawn themselves” would we not be forced to conclude that our Lord gave a command (discipline) that is either foolish, unnecessary, or almost impossible to obey?

“There is not a good way to begin, since many are also guilty of sin.”

No, no, no! Assuming it is true that various ones in a congregation are in sin, living in sin, and serving sin does NOT alter the need for discipline. It rather accentuates the NEED to carefully begin and lovingly proceed to promote righteous and godly living (Tit. 2:11-12) by refusing to condone, support, or ignore any and all sinful ways. Certainly we all sin (Rom. 3:23), but that is so different from rebelliously living in, persisting in serving Satan, and refusing to hear the call to repent from one’s brethren.

WHY We Should Practice Church Discipline Toward The Erring?

First and foremost, because Almighty God commands it.

Visit again these inspired passages:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after

the tradition which he received of us.
(2 The. 3:6)

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
when ye are gathered together, and my
spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus
Christ. (1 Cor. 5:4)

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye
may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.
For even Christ our passover is sacrificed
for us. (1 Cor. 5:7)

When you accept the inspired Scriptures as the only
and final authority in religious matters, you cannot
successfully deny that God expects His people to
exercise corrective church discipline within the family.

Second, our love for each valuable soul demands it.

Jesus spoke of the worth of every soul in Matthew 16:26:

For what is a man profited, if he shall
gain the whole world, and lose his
own soul? or what shall a man give in
exchange for his soul?

None would suggest that a mere soul is not important as
we seek to teach and win one to Christ. Likewise, the erring
soul is of great importance to our Lord. What lessons do
we obtain from the parable of Jesus regarding the one
sheep of the ninety-nine that went astray (Luke 15:4-7)? (1)
The one was of such value as to leave the ninety-nine to seek
the one lost sheep. (2) The shepherd rejoiced when the one
lost sheep was found. (3) There is joy in heaven over one

sinner that repents, even more than ninety-nine souls who remain faithful.

Third, such neglect to maintain the purity of the church will continually and accumulatively reflect evil regarding its members.

The world will see those who profess to be followers of Christ as ones who are as guilty of sinful practices as any in the world. Over time, this neglect will continue to accumulate and the church will become more and more comprised of those who have open sin in their lives.

Fourth, dare we merely turn our backs and just let them go to hell?

After a visit is made to exhort and encourage the erring one, then a follow-up visit of a couple of the members, the decision may be made that it is of no benefit. The consensus may be that the individual does not care, has a hard heart, a seared conscience about spiritual matters and has no intention of returning to Christ. Dear church, those are **observations** of man, conclusions and ideas of mere human beings. Is not the church a type of hospital for sinners instead of a hotel for saints? Must we not exhaust EVERY possible action and thought that could touch their heart? And yes, even when ALL that is done, ultimately and climatically, we care about them so much that we are willing to draw the line of fellowship—excluding them from that fellowship. Even then, the erring one is not to be counted as an enemy, but admonished as a brother (2 The. 3:15).

WHO Are The Erring?

The best and only source for the answer is the Holy Scriptures: any disciple who is “walking disorderly” (2 The. 3:6); a child of God who is “overtaken in a fault” (Gal. 6:1); one who has left his “first love” (Rev. 2:4); a man or

woman who has forsaken Christ (2 Tim. 4:10) and no longer following Jesus Christ (John 6:66); willfully neglecting God (Heb. 10:25-26); serving sin or letting sin reign in them (Rom. 6:12); false teachers and heretics (Tit. 3:10); and those who cause division (Rom. 16:17-18) are erring.

Paul itemized various works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). To the Romans he spoke of those who were filled with unrighteousness (Rom. 1:29-32). Those involved in these sinful ways are worthy of death (Rom. 1:32) and can not and will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21).

WHAT Should Be Done Toward The Erring?

First, toward an erring brother or sister, let us love and care for him/her. They are family. Though they may be living a sinful life at the moment and have turned away from God, Christ, and their spiritual family—he or she is still our brother or sister in the family of God.

Exact details are not given in Scripture. The always relevant inspired Word is applicable to every age and culture. What would be the perfect manner to approach some would NOT be appropriate at all to others. The specifics are left up to man's best judgment. A perfect place to begin is the instructions that God has given us in Matthew's account of the gospel.

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to

hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (Mat. 18:15-17)

Hopefully, prayerfully, the first step or two of these three verses will be sufficient to restore the erring one to the Lord and Saviour (warn them privately, warn them with witnesses).

Tragically, if the erring one refuses to return to God, then the third step is essential (warn them before the church) in our efforts to save this soul from the second death. After seeking to restore them with love (Gal. 6:1) and admonishing and exhorting them (1 The. 5:14), as a last resort (1 Cor. 5:4-5) when the church is assembled—withdrawal is necessary—for the sake of the soul.

Whether it is absolutely clear what specific action or course to follow—at least DO SOMETHING! Refuse to let a precious soul travel down the road to torment without fervently pleading with them to turn back to God, begging them to realize the horror of hell and the beauty of heaven!

WHAT Does “Withdrawing” Fellowship Mean?

Fellowship of the saints of God is a most precious matter. From the beginning of the Lord’s church (Acts 2, Pentecost) the family of God esteemed and valued their joint participation and communion together.

John offers clear and understandable thoughts on this matter:

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship

with him, and walk in darkness, we lie. and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, these things write I unto you. that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only; but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 1:5 -1 John 2:2; emp. mine, PS)

When the Lord adds us to His church, at the time of our complete obedience to Him in baptism, we then have fellowship with God and all the faithful disciples of Christ. We are together, have a common Saviour, abide by the same doctrine, endeavor to walk the same righteous and godly way and share a common goal, heaven eternal.

If we become entangled again in sin and allow ourselves to be overcome (2 Pet. 2:20) we are in a horrible, lost, hopeless state spiritually. If we remain in that condition, we will be lost eternally in torment.

At the point when we become entangled and overcome in sin, we are no longer in fellowship with God. Note again

the passage of 2 Peter when inspiration states that if we walk in darkness we are not in fellowship with God.

Fellow disciples cannot support, condone, or extend the right hand of fellowship to other disciples who are openly and rebelliously living in sin. The principle of “bidding them god speed” of 2 John 9-11 would surely apply if we blessed and approved of their wicked actions. We would become a partaker of their evil deeds.

Yet, let us hasten to add—we should never cease to pray for brethren who have fallen away. We must always love and care about them. We will eagerly seek to encourage them at every opportunity.

Consider this parallel: If a child (who had reached an age of accountability and had become a Christian) turned his back on his parents, rebelled violently against them, plunged into an evil lifestyle, and resisted any attempt from anyone to come back to God—tears would be shed and a hurt that is indescribable would exist. Let us even suppose, for whatever reason, the parents felt it necessary to disinherit that child. But, dear ones, that child is still their child. He will always be a child of theirs. He is involved in a life of sin, but he remains their child—an erring child. And surely the parents would welcome him home if he would turn from his sin and come home. Rejoice, yes, angels in heaven would rejoice (Luke 15:10).

HOW Do We Exhort / Encourage The Erring?

There are many ways for fellow Christians to plead with others who have fallen away, Whether in writing notes expressing our love and concern or in making a special visit to see them and convey our thoughts, the effect is similar.

An excellent way to approach the HOW is consider what you would say if the individual was a member in your own

family. Obviously you would make certain that everything be expressed in love and kindness while emphasizing your sincere concern for their soul's eternal abode if they remain in that lost, fallen state. Yet, you would also know that truth cannot be abandoned nor compromised.

Note the HOW as spoken by the apostle Paul:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. (Gal. 6:1, emp mine, PS)

Meekness conveys strength under control. Our purpose in writing or speaking personally should reflect a calm, under control, kind and tenderhearted (Eph. 4:31-32), loving attitude (John 15:12).

The approach should also be determined by the individual person. For some it might be an emotional plea (I love you, I care about you, I do not want you to be eternally lost, etc.). For others the best approach might be an examination of the Scriptures. A few Scriptures that might be employed are:

Value of each soul—Mat.16:26

Jesus suffered and died that you might be saved—Luke 19:10

Jesus died in vain, if YOU are lost—John 19

Fellowship with God has been broken—1 John 1:7-9

Life is short, fragile, as a vapour—Jam. 4:14

Fallen condition is worse—2 Pet. 2:20-22

Attempting to save a soul from death —

Jam. 5:20

Remaineth no more sacrifice for our
sins — Heb. 10:26

Do not want you to miss the prepared
mansion—John 14:1-3; Rev. 21:4

Death is uncertain (when), but certain to
come—Heb. 9:27

Eternity is endless, never ending,
forever—Mat. 25:46

A word of caution: carefully select your words (think it through even before going or writing) as well as make certain the tone and attitude expressed is loving, kind, gentle, and Christ-like.

HOW Should We Treat The Erring AFTER Withdrawal Has Occurred?

Because of our love for them and the value of their soul, we will ALWAYS continue to love and pray for them. But following the instructions of the Word we will put them away (1 Cor 5:13); have no company with them (2 The. 3:14) and admonish them as a brother (2 The. 3:15).

Likewise, may we add, that we would eagerly receive them back when they repent (turn from their evil ways) (2 Cor. 2:7).

The Consequences If We Neglect Church Discipline

Paul spoke of the glorious bride of Christ in Ephesians 5:

For the husband is the head of the wife,
even as **Christ is the head of the church:**
and **he is the saviour of the body.**

Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as **Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;** That he might sanctify and cleanse it **with** the washing of water by the word. **That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish ...** For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones ... This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church (Eph. 5:23-27; Eph. 5:29-30; Eph. 5:32, emp. mine, PS).

What are the results if the Lord's church fails to practice church discipline? (1) Clearly we have noted the fact the Lord commands this action, thus if we neglect this practice we are openly disobeying the Lord. (2) If we turn our backs on the fallen after a few unsuccessful gestures toward restoring them, then we are accepting their spiritual state with full knowledge that our Lord requires us to take further action (difficult, hard, challenging, emotional as it may be). (3) A wrong message is conveyed to the church, additional erring ones, and even the community around us. When others are aware of the facts that certain erring ones are rebelliously involved in sinful practices and the church closes its eyes to such, the respect of others will be lost. Why should they esteem us when we fail

to rise above the world of sin and even tolerate sinful ways among the members? (4) Most important of all, God will be displeased. Do we need to remind the church family that God has commanded that action be taken? Is it necessary to acknowledge the responsibility of seeking to restore the erring is upon our shoulders? It is really not a “forgotten” commandment—it is actually a “neglected” commandment.

Conclusion

Every command of God is important. We are not allowed to “pick and choose” what we wish to obey and what we wish to discard. Obedience is mandatory (Mat. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9; Acts 5:29). The faithful follower of God recognizes the essentiality of baptism for **it is a command to be obeyed** in order to be saved *from* our sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21). In like manner, the faithful church must practice church discipline, for **it is a command to be obeyed** in order to be faithful to our Lord and Master.

It is appropriate to go to Ezekiel 3:17-21 and accurately note that other’s blood will be on our hands if we fail to warn them. Admittedly, this is an Old Testament passage (written to those during a different dispensation and under a different law) but conveys a principle that applies to Christians today (Gal. 6:1; Mat. 18:15-17; Jam. 5:19-20; 1 The. 5:14).

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CHAPTER 18

And Laid It At The Apostles Feet: The Encouragement Of Liberal Giving

Floyd Rogers

Allow me to express my appreciation to Wade Webster and the elders of this great congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ. I have purchased the Power Lectures' books for a number of years for the great information and in-depth study of God's Word. To have the opportunity to contribute a small part to such a great event is a blessing from God. Thank you for your invitation!

Introduction

It is easy for man to find faults in others. It is also easy for individuals to ridicule others; however, it takes effort to find the good in any individual. As children of God, we have a responsibility to take the extra step, to go the extra mile, and to do the unusual. Jesus commanded,

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An
eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil:
but whosoever shall smite thee on thy

right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. (Mat. 5:38-42; KJV)

When one considers Joses—in the American Standard Version of the Bible, he is called Joseph—that Levite from Cyprus—one is reminded of the words of Jesus that are found in the Sermon on the Mount. Many do not call him by this name; they know him better as Barnabas. The apostles gave Joseph a nickname that declared his conduct and character. Joseph became known as Barnabas because he was such an encourager. The Bible says, “And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus” (Acts 4:36). It was Barnabas that stood with Paul when he wanted to adjoin himself to the disciples in Jerusalem after his conversion (Acts 9:27). It was Barnabas that stood with his nephew John Mark (Col. 4:10) to travel on the second missionary journey (Acts 15:37) after he turned back from the first missionary journey (Acts 13:13). It was Barnabas who stood with the church in Antioch and the growth was so outstanding that Barnabas went to Tarsus to get the assistance of Paul (Acts 11:25). It was in Antioch with the teaching and preaching that the disciples were first called “Christians” (Acts 11:26).

The apostles nicknamed Joses Barnabas meaning “The son of consolation.” Barnabas, an encourager, exemplified the teachings of Jesus by going the extra mile. The Bible says,

“Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:37). Barnabas was the type of Christian who was zealous about the Lord’s business, for he loved his Saviour.

To appreciate Barnabas, his zeal and his attitude, it is needful that we see three important things: (1) A True Steward; (2) A Timely Sacrifice; and (3) A Testimony of Strength.

A True Steward

Barnabas displays the true qualities of a steward. As we look at the word *steward*, the Strong’s and Vine’s Dictionary says, “Dispensation, Stewardship, Administration (household or estate)” (Strong, “Oikonomos”; Vine, “Steward”). A steward is overseeing the business of the master’s house. The steward is handling the affairs of the Lord’s house. Jesus is the Master, the Lord of the house (Acts 17:24). Paul, that great writer of at least thirteen epistles, proclaimed that stewards should be faithful (1 Cor. 4:1-2). The Lord’s Church understood the importance of stewardship for the Bible states, “And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need” (Acts 2:44-45). Luke, the writer of Acts, as the Holy Spirit guided him, wrote,

Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Josus, who by the apostles was surnamed

Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:34-37)

As I have heard this over the years and studied this, I have come to realize that by the apostles giving Joseph the name Barnabas, perhaps this man motivated the other children of God to follow his example. After all, when one continues to read into Acts 5, we run into Ananias and his wife Sapphira. They even sold possessions of their land, but they tried to lie about the price or gain for the property (Acts 5:3-4; Acts 5:9-10).

Stewards Realize It Is Not Theirs

We must keep some things in mind each day that we live, move, and have our being; first this world is not my home (1 Pet. 2:11; Heb. 11:13; Psa. 39:12; Psa. 119:19); and second, these things that we are addicted to are not ours (Jam. 1:17). Whatever we have, it does not belong to you and me. Everything belongs to the God of Heaven. When God took time to speak to old man Job out of the whirlwind, the Lord reminded Job, all that we see, all that we have, all that we know of, belongs to Him. I like how the American Standard Version of the Bible says, "Who hath first given unto me, that I should repay him? (Whatsoever is) under the whole heaven is mine" (Job 41:11). We need to stress to this lost and dying world how important it is to remember 1 Chronicles 29:12. David, the shepherd boy who became the King of Israel, wrote: "Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all" (1 Chr. 29:12). Whatever one receives on this side

of life comes by the aid of the Almighty God. We must not get so comfortable in this world that we forget where our blessings derive. As servants, as preachers and teachers, we must instruct and remind God's people of the words God instructed Moses to give to Israel. In Deuteronomy 8:11-18, we read,

Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is

he that giveth thee power to get wealth,
that he may establish his covenant which
he swear unto thy fathers, as it is this day.
(Deut. 8:11-18)

The Lord's Church, Barnabas, and his fellow laborers together in love understood the significance of it, and that all of it belonged to the Lord from start to finish.

Stewards Prepare for the Accountability

The Son of Encouragement encouraged others to go that extra mile. Barnabas brought the money he had received after selling his land and laid it at the apostles' feet. It was not his from the beginning, so now it was easy for him to lay it at the apostles' feet and not concern himself with who was getting what and how much. Barnabas presented it to the apostles, and the apostles allotted it out, as it was needed. As Barnabas was accountable to what God for his material blessings, the apostles became accountable to God for what was given into their care. We are accountable and must prepare to give an account (Mat. 18:23; Gal. 6:5; 1 Pet. 4:5). Jesus in Luke 16 spoke the parable of accountability. Now in the *Commentary of the Gospel According to Luke*, this is the "Parable of the Unjust Steward"; it is here called the 'Parable of the Unrighteous Steward'" (Boles 309). In studying this parable, I have always liked how the writer of the *Commentary* wrote it:

The day of reckoning had come; the steward was to be discharged. He was asked: "What is this that I hear of thee? Render the account of thy stewardship" which literally means "give back" that which you have fraudulently taken."

I believe that Jesus captivated His audience by pointing out that many were squandering their precious blessings. The apostle Paul reminds us of the very same type of accountability by saying, “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12).

Stewards Display Their Love and Loyalty

Jesus, the Lord of lords, the King of kings, and only Potentate has rules, and we must follow His example (1 Tim. 6:15; 1 Pet. 2:21). Jesus displayed His love and His loyalty to you and me; therefore, we must walk in His paths. Jesus declared,

A new commandment I give unto you,
That ye love one another; as I have loved
you, that ye also love one another. By
this shall all men know that ye are my
disciples, if ye have love one to another.
(John 13:34-35)

This is the love we must carry and display to our brothers and sisters. Our love and our loyalty must be true to the Lord, to ourselves, and to those we reach. We reach up to the Lord to reach out to those around us. Each day, we must learn how to lay down our lives for others so others can gain through our lives. We help, we rescue, and we strive to save as many as we can. Whatever we do, it must be done to glorify the Lord of lords. The apostle John said it as;

Hereby perceive we the love of God,
because he laid down his life for us: and
we ought to lay down our lives for the
brethren. But whoso hath this world's
good, and seeth his brother have need,

and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:16-18)

It is not enough to just say we love others; we must show our love. We cannot only talk a good game, but we must also be about doing the Lord's business (Rom. 12:11). Yes, we must even reach that enemy who controls us, so that we can allow the Lord to have total control over our lives. Jesus said,

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Mat. 5:44-48)

Barnabas, the son of encouragement, a true steward, realized that what he had was not his; he was preparing for his accountability, and he displayed his love and loyalty

to all to glorify God. Can we check ourselves before we wreck ourselves?

A Timely Sacrifice

God's timetable is different from ours; yet God gives us an opportunity to present that timely sacrifice. Once we become a child of God, a Christian, we live our lives as a daily sacrifice. Paul, as he wrote to the church in Rome, declared, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). Vine's says sacrifice is an offering ("Thusia").

Outside of Christ Jesus, one is dead in sin. If one is in sin, then he is separated from God (Isa. 59:1-2; Psa. 66:18). The Lord desires a living sacrifice; therefore, one must become alive.

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved). (Eph. 2:1-5)

We are made alive in Christ Jesus and life is only in Him. In Jesus is where we are reconciled back to God the Father (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Have we forgotten John 10:10? Yes, it was Jesus who declared, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Timely Sacrifices Cost

“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal. 4:4). God had set forth the appropriate time and Jesus fulfilled the Father’s will. As Jesus offered a timely sacrifice, so must the sons and daughters of God. We can argue that Jesus’s sacrifices were great, and we must not take them for granted, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). This is such a beautiful passage, but it must be placed beside Philippians 2:7-8, “But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phi. 2:7-8). To fully appreciate Jesus’s timely sacrifice we must understand, Jesus “laid aside the glory of His divine majesty that he was to all appearance a man, even a servant, so that men refuse to recognize Him as divine, but despised, persecuted, and last crucified” (Lipscomb 112).

Barnabas was provided the time to make a timely sacrifice that cost him; yet he realized it cost him nothing compared to what Jesus gave. Whatever and however we give, it will never amount to what Jesus has done for mankind. Barnabas’ love for the Lord opened up his sacrificial mind to encourage and challenge others to give timely.

Timely Sacrifices Cause One to Remember

I realize that because the apostles named Barnabas the Son of Consolation, we forget about calling him Joseph. The name Joseph literally means “God shall add.” We need to place ourselves in the place that allows God to add to our lives. It is time to remember the promises of God. God has promised to add to our lives when we place Him and His church first. That famous verse has not changed. Jesus said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat. 6:33). It is essential that God’s children remember Jesus died so that He could have the preeminence (Col. 1:18). Barnabas obeyed the gospel of Jesus, yet being a Levite, he remembered the teachings of old. Passages such as Malachi 3:10 had not left his mind concerning timely sacrifices that caused one to remember. The prophet wrote,

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse,
that there may be meat in mine house,
and prove me now herewith, saith the
LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the
windows of heaven, and pour you out
a blessing, that there shall not be room
enough to receive it. (Mal. 3:10)

Do we remember and still teach Proverbs 3:9-10, “Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine”?

Timely sacrifices cause one to remember that he can trust God because God is a God of His Word. I love to remind individuals of Numbers 23:19, “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should

repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" When God says it, one can bank on God's Word. God has promised to supply our needs according to Philippians 4:19, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." That would include food, clothing, shelter, companionship, love, and salvation. It does not include all of the luxuries that we have come to think of as needs. As the Lord supplies our needs, He expects His children to do the right things; that is what Barnabas did, as he laid it at the apostle's feet.

A Testimony of Strength

Barnabas believed in God. Barnabas was thankful that God was and is the giver of all good and perfect things (James 1:17). Barnabas, a Levite, knew that he gained his strength from the Lord. God's servant, the Son of Encouragement, was a follower of God's word; so it is very possible that (1 Chronicles 28:20) was near and dear to him. Barnabas gained his strength from the Word of God. Barnabas had heard where David instructed his son saying,

And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.
(1 Chr. 28:20)

Realizing that God will never leave you nor fail you should mold you to stand firm in the strength of the Almighty.

As the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, he wrote, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10).

Testimony of Strength Seen in his Liberality

Barnabas was a liberal giver. God desires that mankind become liberal givers to the point that He explains to us through His word how He gives. I teach that if you ask God the correct questions, then God will give you the correct answer through His word. Well, how does the Lord give to mankind? James writes,

But let patience have her perfect work,
that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting
nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let
him ask of God, that giveth to all men
liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall
be given him. But let him ask in faith,
nothing wavering. For he that wavereth
is like a wave of the sea driven with the
wind and tossed. (Jam. 1:4-6)

How does God give? The Bible says liberally. The words *liberal*, *liberally*, and *liberality* are Bible words. What does that word mean in that context? It means “bountifully” (Strong, “Haplos”). The Son of Encouragement was motivated by God being a liberal giver so certainly he could give liberally. Truly, the Lord loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). This Levite, strong in the word of old, counted on God fulfilling His promises. We can and should be liberal givers because Jesus offered a way so we can reap as we give. In Luke 6:38, Jesus spoke, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the

same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”

My grandmother taught me to give back to God first and God would open up the windows of Heaven and pour out blessings on me so that I could not receive them all (Mal. 3:10). From picking cotton to cutting yards and raking leaves, she always instructed me to give to the Lord first. To make sure I did what I was told, I had to prove to her what I had gotten paid and she wanted to see how I was going to give to the Lord. She instructed and God strengthened and it was not a problem for me to give. It is sad today that many homes do not take time to instruct their children; therefore today we are living in a selfish society. We must instruct; we must remind our people so they can have that strength to do the right thing. The apostle Paul wrote;

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work. (2 Cor. 9:6-8)

Ananias and Sapphira proved to us that God’s children can and are addicted to things. They proved to you and me that material things can cost us our salvation. Barnabas, a man of goodness, a man of spiritual growth, a man of general

principles, a man of genuineness, a man who God showed was a man of generosity. His giving— his liberal giving—showed strength to overcome temptation of keeping something that could aid others.

Conclusion

Joseph who the apostles nicknamed Barnabas which is interpreted, “the son of consolation,” displayed an example that speaks while he yet sleeps. Barnabas, a true steward, exemplified the attitude and zeal that Christians need today. He did what he could do in a timely manner and encouraged others to go the extra mile, to take the extra step, and to do the unusual. In reality Christianity is all about doing God’s Will and doing the unexpected for those with whom God allows us to come into contact. Children of God gain their strength from the reading, studying, and meditating upon the Word of God. God’s children should be liberal for there is nothing that we have that does not belong to the Almighty. Jesus asked a question and it should dwell in our hearts continually. Our Savior has asked, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mat. 16:26; Mark 8:36; Luke 9:25).

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CHAPTER 19

Shaking Off The Dust Of Discouragement

John DeBerry

Since the Bible was inspired and written thousands of years ago, many sayings and statements reflect the environment and culture of the original authors. These statements were often difficult to translate into English and still maintain their historical profundity. We must also consider that the Bible is of Eastern origin, produced by those who lived in what we now call the Middle East. This being true, it is often challenging for our Western minds to grasp the truths contained within many of these period statements.

One of those Eastern idioms, which I have quoted in various sermons, is the foundation of our discussions for this great lectureship. When the apostle Paul and his companion Barnabas traveled to Antioch of Pisidia, they preached to great crowds in the synagogue. The Jews soon became envious and sought to oppose them and have them expelled from the city (Acts 13:44-52; KJV). Paul put up a great defense (Acts 13:46-47); however, the Jews stirred up a greater crowd of “big shots” and had Paul and Barnabas run out of the region. This is when the apostle Paul performed the symbolic gesture suggested to the twelve by their Lord Jesus as recorded in Matthew’s gospel:

And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, **shake off** the dust of your feet. (Mat. 10:14, emp. mine JD)

This Middle Eastern custom denoted total disdain for those who refused to accept the Word and grace of God. It was to say to the Jews, who were to be approached first, that their rejection rendered them to be counted as **heathens**. Therefore, as heathens the very dust of their land was corrupt and was to be removed from the shoes.

Do Not Be Discouraged

The infinite wisdom of God is evident in our Lord's statement. He knew that he had given the twelve a difficult task, considering the wide-spread arrogance, corruption, and disobedience among the Jewish hierarchy. He also knew that the embedded man-made customs and traditions would be difficult for many of their brethren to forsake.

Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. (Mat. 10:16-18)

If these 12 hand-picked men were to preach this great story of redemption effectively to an often unreceptive

audience, they must have the “courage to not be discouraged.” Jesus wanted them to leave with their resolve and integrity intact when they were rejected and persecuted for His sake. He admonished them to shake it off and not consider their refusal as a sign of failure. They were to remember that they represented Jesus and His word and not be discouraged by harsh treatment. They were not to allow fear, animosity, bitterness, or anger to dwell within them; these all lead to debilitating discouragement. Jesus did not want them unduly burdened because of confusion of their orders. They were not responsible for the audiences’ actions or accountable for their refusal to obey. They served God’s purpose when they proclaimed the message. The response of the hearers is a matter between them and God. Therefore, Paul’s actions at Antioch and his unmoved attitude and behavior is representative of the Lord’s intent; “And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 13:52). Paul’s party refused to be distracted or detoured and obediently shook off the dust of discouragement and moved on to the next city.

Discouragement, A Well-Used Tool Of The Devil

From the beginning of human history, God’s enemy and man’s adversary, the Devil, has used discouragement as one of his most potent and successful tools. He knows and understands both the intellectual and the emotional makeup of mankind and seeks to exploit both. He knows that if he can trick the intellect, he can effectively control the emotional. This being so, the Devil has a number of effective tactics to accomplish discouragement. Peter, understanding the Devil’s relentless attacks, urged the church to keep their eyes open, because their opponent’s ultimate intent was their destruction:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

To understand our English words *discourage/discouragement*, we turn to Webster's New World College Dictionary. Therein, the words are defined as: (1) to deprive of courage, (2) to deprive of hope, and (3) to deprive of confidence. It is, therefore, defined as the act of effectively disheartening by skillfully place objections and obstacles before a person until he abandons his goals and aspirations. For the purpose of our discussion, the goal and aspiration is serving the Lord and saving our souls.

In Peter's first epistle, he had already called the church to be encouraged and faithful.

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. (1 Pet. 1:13-15)

Peter used his master's obedient example in the midst of discouraging persecution to exhort the church to shake off discouragement:

For even hereunto were ye called:
because Christ also suffered for us,
leaving us an example, that ye should
follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither
was guile found in his mouth: Who,
when he was reviled, reviled not again;
when he suffered, he threatened not; but
committed himself to him that judgeth
righteously. (1 Pet. 2:21-23)

In this context the word *reviled* (*loidoreo*) basically means to be railed on, attacked, and despised. Peter noted that Jesus remained focused on His mission and refused to be discouraged or embittered by the depraved action of others. Also, in this same passage (1 Pet. 1:23), the word *committed* (*paradidomi*) effectively means to deliver over or present over. This brings to mind the apostle Paul's defense against discouragement: "becoming a willing sacrifice to God's purpose," and then accepting without expectation and complaint what comes with that sacrifice. Paul admonished the brethren at Rome to consider that it was reasonable and rational to make an irrevocable **commitment** to the Lord considering the grace and mercy evident in providing our salvation, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). The Devil cannot discourage those who have accepted God's grace with thanksgiving and presented their vessels to humble, dedicated service. Their hopes and expectations are not in this world, but are all in Christ Jesus.

Satan Can ONLY Discourage You—When Your Hopes Are Still In Men

The adversary's intent is to make you give up. To accomplish this, he must convince you to seek happiness and contentment in this present world. If he can get into your head and frustrate, distract, and create anxiety, he can possibly discourage you as he did the Hebrews. The Hebrews writer was given the task of re-engaging those brethren who were headed for apostasy. They had become severely discouraged by persecution and mistreatment. The message to them was not compromising, lenient, or apologetic. It was a call to **action**, an appeal to shake off the discouragement which was rendering them useless to the cause of Christ. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which you have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Heb. 2:1).

The messenger warns them that they must get control of their emotions and concentrate on those things they have been taught. Then when they allow their intellect to control, the important reality of salvation will not simply drift away. This is a classic demonstration of the process of discouragement, as well as the process to shake it off. Discouragement had shamefully taken them aback: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat" (Heb. 5:12).

Before the Hebrews writer could continue his discussion of the weightier matters of salvation, he had to pause and deal with their discouragement, which was the result of immaturity. As a matter of fact, he used the rarely used phrase *dull of hearing* (Heb. 5:11), which is also translated *slothful* (Heb. 6:12), to shake them from

their lethargy and begin the process of encouragement. “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God” (Heb. 6:1).

Discouragement impedes and even derails personal growth and progress. When Christians become disheartened they tend to nitpick, complain about the unimportant, and get stuck in the elementary instructions of God’s Word. Therefore *perfection* here denotes completeness, fullness, and continuance. Notice the author’s action statement to the Hebrews, “Let us go on.” He wants them to shake off the dust of discouragement and come alive and show faith toward God.

In the midst of discouragement, the Hebrews were encouraged to “Lay aside every eight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1).

Discouragement: Melted Hearts

The apostle Paul encouraged the church at Rome to remain unified in Christ and uplift the discouraged (Rom. 15:1). Paul also used this occasion to remind them to heed examples recorded in the Scripture of those who lived in earlier times, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). We are all admonished to review those things occurring beforehand in order to get an accurate grasp of God’s Word.

In our discussion on discouragement and “shaking it off,” we go back to a lesson written **aforetime**. Moses preached to the disoriented and discouraged children

of Israel, before they were lead into the promise land, reminding them of their chronic discouragement from the very beginning. He recounted the events surrounding the twelve, one man from each tribe who were sent to spy out the land. Their report was split, with 10 giving an evil report and two saying, "Let us take the land." Moses wanted them to renounce their discouragement because it was so unnecessary. God had promised and given the land; still they focused more on the ten spies' words of doom, than the Lord God's words of victory;

And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we. (Deu. 1:27-28)

Therein lies the truth about discouragement; it often fails to account for what God has consistently done for us. For the Devil to convince Israel that "God hated them" after he had performed so many wonders to liberate them from Egyptian bondage was simply ridiculous. However, here again emotions overrode intellect. It is important to note here that the word *discouraged* (*masas*) describes accurately what lead them to 40 years of wilderness wandering: "Their hearts melted." In spite of God's power and fidelity, they allowed their emotions—fear, anger and suspicion—to overturn the truth. When they said, "The people is greater and taller than we" (Deu. 1:28), they were saying in effect, "The Amorites are bigger than God."

The Devil always wants us to believe that our troubles, trials, tribulations and tests are greater than God.

Discouragement Convinces Us To Focus On What Is Weak In Us Instead Of What Is Powerful In God

When we shake off the dust of discouragement, we realize that there is nothing too hard for God (Gen. 18:14). Thus, the words of Solomon come before us, encouraging us to depend on God when troubled and not on ourselves; “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Pro. 3:5-6).

This trust will combat discouragement and encourage faith and submission. For this reason, Joshua wrote that God had promised to “Make thy way prosperous and then thou shalt have good success” (Jos. 1:8).

The purpose of this promise was to help Israel shake the dust of discouragement and move on and take the land, “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee withsoever thou goest” (Jos. 1:9). It is interesting to examine the word *dismayed* in this passage. Here God is stressing that they are to show courage and faith and not be “cast down or broken down.” The people had to realize that God had kept His promise and given them the land (Jos. 1:13). Doing so, they were encouraged and uplifted and stood together and announced their commitment to God and Joshua: “And they answered Joshua saying, All that thou commandest us, we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go” (Jos. 1:16). To achieve this turn around, Joshua had passionately appealed to the people’s hearts and had awakened their faith. It is only when

God's Word penetrates the heart that discouragement can be overcome and the joy of service be rekindled. "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, The Lord your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land" (Jos. 1:13). From this juncture the people first promised to "Harken unto thee [Joshua]" and prayed that God would be with Joshua "as he was with Moses" (Jos. 1:17). Then they also pledged to see to it that no one would discourage them from within again.

Whosoever he be that doth rebel
against thy commandment, and will
not hearken unto thy words in all that
thou commandest him, he shall be put
to death: only be strong and of a good
courage. (Jos. 1:18)

Remember Solomon taught in Proverbs 23:7, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he."

How Can We Be Christ-like And Discouraged At The Same Time?

Every time I read one of the Gospels' accounts of our Lord's crucifixion, I shudder in shame. We can all recall those moments when the difficulties of life and Christian service have so burdened us that we became weary. It is at these times of discouragement that I remember the privilege of being a son of God and the awful cost of that privilege.

Let this mind be in you, which was also
in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form
of God, thought it not robbery to be

equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. (Phi. 2:5-7)

We are to keep an obedient mind if we are to be Christ-like; doing this we can shake discouragement. The Lord's advice is simple and to the point:

1. Avoid timidity. "Why are you so fearful?" (Mat. 8:26).
2. Do not worry. "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1).
3. Abide in Him. "Abide in me and I in you" (John 15:4).
4. Be converted. "Except ye be converted and become as little children" (Mat. 18:3).
5. Finish it. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13).

Jesus has promised never to leave us or forsake us. When we hear His Word and lean on His everlasting arm, we can finish this journey, shaking off discouragement.

CHAPTER 20

Encouraging Diligence In Deacons

Randy Collum

When considering the need to encourage deacons to be diligent this author can not help but think of a CD given to him by Paul Sain. On the CD was a lecture presented by Andrew Connally at the 1969 Freed-Hardeman College Lectureship on “Challenges Facing The Church Today.” The topic assigned to brother Connally was entitled “Overcoming Mediocrity.” In this sermon (it is much more a sermon than a lecture), there is no doubt left that a great many deficiencies in the Lord’s Church could be corrected if each one would adopt a different attitude. He contended that every Christian should have an attitude that refuses to settle for the status quo or a half way measure, but rather is determined to overcome mediocrity. The target audience for that lecture was not confined to the new Christian, or the “regular” members, but called for the leaders; elders, preachers, and yes even the deacons to rise above the level of mediocre. The call that he sent out is still as relevant today as it was the day he made it.

It is a sad time indeed when one of the largest problems in the Church of our Lord is not false teachers and persecution, but rather mediocrity. This was not a new problem in his generation, nor is it a problem new to our generation.

When the apostle John was given a message to deliver to the churches of Asia in his day there were those that needed the same message.

And unto the of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. (Rev. 3:14-16)

This manuscript is not meant to be an outline of the characteristics of those who would perform the task of deacon, though they will be referenced often. Paul well defined those characteristics to Timothy (1 Tim. 3:8-13; KJV) and one would not have to look long before discovering many well-written commentaries on those qualifications and their meanings. The main point of this manuscript will be to encourage those who serve as deacons, or desire to serve as deacons, to be about the work of a deacon and to be diligent in that work. If there is a word that embodies the antithesis of *mediocrity*, it would quite possibly be the word *diligence*, and so for diligence we will strive to achieve.

In the midst of Paul's conveyance of the qualifications, or characteristics, of those men who should be selected to serve as a deacon, he expresses the core principle from which we shall derive our course of study. "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 3:13). In order to be a deacon that uses his office

well a man must: (1) Understand the nature of a deacon; (2) Understand the duties of a diligent deacon; (3) Develop himself into a diligent deacon; and (4) Recognize the results of his diligence.

The Nature Of A Deacon

The Greek word *diakonos* from which the word *deacon* in the New Testament is derived is a common, everyday word which in its simplest definition means “servant” or “minister.” It is applied to individuals throughout the New Testament who hold no position of authority in the church local or universal. In fact a *diakonos* during the first century would have been a possession of his master, had no personal rights or opinions, and was subject to be sold without choice in the matter. Depending on who owned this servant, he may have been stripped of his identity, subjected to unjust demands, and it is doubtful that he would receive any fruits from his labors (Turner 28). This picture of a *diakonos* is a far cry from the seat of authority many try to assign to a deacon today.

It is by the context that one can determine if the writer intended to indicate that a particular *diakonos* was a slave/servant or an office within the Lord’s Church (The word *office* will be used throughout this manuscript to refer to the role in the Church specified by the inspiration of God). Therefore, the word *diakonos* is translated *servant* or *minister* rather than *deacon* when the context does not support an office in the church. This usage in the common form is found both in the gospel accounts, which transpire prior to the establishment of the Church, and in the letters which follow the establishment. Some examples of this use prior to the establishment of the Church would be: Minister (Mat. 20:26; Mark 10:43); Servant(s) (Mat. 23:11; Mat. 22:13; Mark 9:35; John 2:5; John 2:9; John 12:26).

The use of the word *diakonos* is used after the establishment of the Church to convey a sense of service, but never referring to an actual slave/servant. Paul is the only writer to use this word outside of the gospel accounts and he uses it in a variety of ways to convey the message. He uses it once to describe the authority of those in civil government calling them “the minister of God to thee for good” (Rom. 13:4). The false apostles who taught against Paul in Corinth are described as “ministers” for Satan (2 Cor. 11:15). Their integrity and relationship to the work of Christ is questioned when Paul asks, “Are they ministers of Christ?” (2 Cor. 11:23). Paul refers to himself and those who had taught the truth in Corinth as ministers (1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6) and clarifies that they were “ministers of God” (2 Cor. 6:4). He makes this same statement about Timothy to the Thessalonians (1 The. 3:2). When commending Tychicus and Epaphras for their level of commitment to the work of the Lord, he described them each as having been a “faithful minister” (Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7; Col. 4:7). Even one sister in the faith, Phebe, is classified by Paul as a “servant (still *diakonos*) of the church” (Rom. 16:1). [Note: This is the only time it is translated as servant outside of the gospel accounts.]

Moreover, there are two other ways in which Paul uses this word to make his point. Paul wrote that his being “made a minister” was a “gift of the grace of God” (Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23; Col. 1:25). He explains that “grace” to be his privilege to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ “among the Gentiles” (Eph. 3:8). When writing to Timothy, he will encourage him to be “a good minister of Jesus Christ” by preaching to the brethren those things which he had been taught (1 Tim. 4:6).

The other point Paul makes by using *diakonos* is seen when he describes the work which Jesus did in bringing salvation to men. Once, Paul used it to make the point that

the sins of justified men do not make the Jesus “the minister of sin” (Gal. 2:17). Then again, he uses it to describe Jesus as “a minister of the circumcision” for the purpose of fulfilling the promise of salvation for all men (Rom. 15:8).

The preceding uses of the word *diakonos* do not indicate a sanctioned office within the Church. However, there are three instances where the word clearly has a more specific office in mind. In these three instances, you will find *diakonos* translated as *deacon*. The first is in the opening verse of Paul’s letter to Philippi. “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Phi. 1:1). Paul’s inclusion of the bishops with the deacons, separate and distinct from the “saints” sets them off as a specific classification of persons in that local congregation.

The second and third times *diakonos* is translated *deacon* are both found in the context of the qualifications and characteristics that Paul gives to Timothy regarding this office (1 Tim. 3:8-13). The specific nature of these qualifications and characteristics as Paul lists them leaves little to no doubt that the Lord had in mind a servant of a special class. There is an undeniable similarity between the qualifications of these *diakonas* (deacons) and those listed in the verses immediately preceding them which contain the qualifications of a bishop (elder, shepherd, pastor) (1 Tim. 3:1-12). These two specific offices are described for Timothy and us so “that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

The Duties Of Diligent Deacons

The official duties of an appointed deacon are not provided for us in Scripture. However, the responsibilities

of these men can be best drawn from an understanding of his designation. A deacon in the organization of the local church is a “servant” or “minister” for God. The fact that the Scriptures devote such attention to this office, by providing special qualifications for this servant or minister, necessitates that he must be a “special servant” or “special minister” for the Lord and His work. Yet even as a special servant they, like all saints, fall under the oversight of the eldership of the local congregation. The duties of these men is then determined and directed by that eldership with which they work.

No where in Scripture are deacons given authority in or over the local congregation. The humble meaning of the designation they wear should convey to all that this was not to be a position of congregational authority. Rather the role of a deacon is to fulfill the task or service they have been assigned by the eldership, those who do have authority as overseers of the flock. Therefore, without an eldership in place there can be no official “office” of a deacon at a local congregation because they have no overseers.

This does not mean that those men who have the characteristics listed by Paul (1 Tim. 3) are to stand by and do nothing because they are not serving in an official office as deacon. In fact, the very opposite is true. This is a golden opportunity for each man to be “proved” (1 Tim. 3:10) so that when the time comes when capable men are installed as elders, they will have men ready to “use the office of a deacon well” (1 Tim. 3:13). Men can be, and should be, fulfilling the roles of a “deacon” as a servant of God without an official office.

Those who do sit in the office of a deacon fulfill a much needed role in the Lord’s Church. This is a privilege praised by the Lord through the pen of Paul. The particular services rendered will vary from congregation to congregation. It

may be anything from sweeping the floors to maintaining the educational curriculum. Elders will often give deacons the various maintenance responsibilities associated with their congregation. Various mission programs may be designated to a deacon to keep an eye on. A deacon may be asked to coordinate the men who will serve in the worship assembly. Deacons have been known to serve as the treasurer or to be tasked with writing checks to pay the bills. The idea is that these men see to the physical needs of a congregation, so that the shepherds can see to the spiritual needs.

A word of caution is necessary here. Deacons are given an area of responsibility and with that responsibility needs to come the authority to fulfill that responsibility. That authority is not over a congregation; he is not a junior elder; but he must be able to fulfill his task without constant management or else his purpose is moot. Elders are responsible for the men they appoint as deacons and do need to see that the work is being done properly. But if you cannot appoint men that you trust to do the job, then they ought to be left out. When elders end up doing the deacon's jobs, the Lord's work suffers.

The primary duties of a diligent deacon may be physical, but they should not be limited to that. There was a group of seven men selected in Jerusalem to fulfill a physical need of the local congregation (Acts 6:1-8). These men were never declared to sit in the office of deacon, however one of the characteristics required of these men stands out as relevant to the duties of today's deacons. The twelve required that the men selected be "full of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 6:3). It is possible that this is a reference to their ability to perform miracles (with the name "Holy Ghost" being used as metonymy for the power He imparts; see Acts 19:6). One of those seven, Stephen, is recorded as being able to perform miracles (Acts

6:8). However, unless his ability was to multiply bread, it would have little use in the seven's purpose of serving tables.

A better understanding might be found by observing the conjunction and coupling the second part of the requirement to the first. These men were to be “full of the Holy Spirit **and wisdom**” (Acts 6:3). What better men to see to the physical needs of others than ones who fully understand the way the Lord has seen to the spiritual needs of all. Nothing else is said about their care for the widows in Jerusalem; however, the next 2 1/2 chapters are dedicated to the preaching that Stephen and Philip did. The deacons duties extend beyond the physical by virtue of the spiritual purpose they fulfill.

The Development Of Diligent Deacons

The development of a diligent deacon by a local congregation is dependent on two factors: A man's love for God and his love for his fellow man. Why else would a man give his life, but due to love? Men who love this world “exercise dominion” over one another (Mat. 20:25). But “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him 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” (Mat. 20:26-28). Men concerned with this world want to use titles like “Father” or “Master” (Mat. 23:9-10). “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Mat. 23:11). If not careful, rather than developing diligent deacons, we will develop dedicated title seekers.

The development of diligent deacons is not an accident. Kenneth Blanchard is credited with saying, “There is a difference between interest and commitment. When you are interested in doing something you do it when it is convenient. When you are committed to something you

accept no excuses; only results.” When deacons serve out of duty rather than out of love, they might be interested but they will never be committed. There is no secret formula to developing diligent deacons. Find a man that loves the Lord with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind and who loves his neighbor as himself. Then you will have a diligent deacon who needs to be recognized for the need he is already filling.

For one who desires to be a diligent deacon he need only do that which is his reasonable service. Paul describes that service as presenting “your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Rom. 12:1). In the verses that follow this plea, Paul gives a reasonable review of the mind of one who has been transformed by renewing his mind and has proven for himself that the will of God is good, acceptable, and perfect (Rom. 12:2).

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth,

let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. (Rom. 12:3-8)

The Results Of Being A Diligent Deacon

The idea of being a deacon, in the minds of some men, is a lot like the idea of being an honorary member of some social club. They see others in the office of a deacon, they think it is a good thing to be a deacon, and perhaps one day they might want to be a deacon as well, but they are not sure what good it will do anyone. Those who desire to be a deacon need an need to understand the great importance the role of a deacon in the Lord's church is. Many have never seen or been shown the full extent of the great benefit their service has for the kingdom of God. If there is a need to encourage deacons to be diligent, it has grown out of a need to put them in remembrance of the Lord they serve.

Among the qualifications given in Timothy is "holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (1 Tim. 3:9). A deacon that does not have a deep appreciation for "the faith" can hardly be expected to be diligent about his work. Paul often makes reference to the gospel system of faith as a mystery—not because it is beyond one's understanding, but rather because it requires a diligent examination to fully grasp. A superficial understanding of the faith will not suffice for one that is to hold an office such as deacon in the Church of our Lord. If a man is unwilling to put forth the effort to know the mystery fully, how can he be expected to put forth the effort to care for more physical needs within the Church.

Paul declares the need for a deacon to "hold" this mystery "in a pure conscience." Thus a deacon is to have full knowledge and confidence in the gospel of Christ. Paul praises as great the "mystery of godliness" and summarizes it

for Timothy, and us, in the close of this chapter. He defines it as: “God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim. 3:16). While these may seem like fundamental truths to which every Christian should hold, there are too many deacons whose hold on these truths is less than pure. Viewing the benefactor of your work as mystery of godliness should encourage any deacon to be more diligent in his work.

Conclusion

May those who serve in the office of deacon never forget that the work they do is a Holy work, set aside by a Holy God, for His Holy purpose. While their work is filled with physical tasks, the results of that work have a spiritual benefit. When Paul records that they “purchase to themselves a good degree” (1 Tim. 3:13), that degree is both on this earth and in heaven.

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CHAPTER 21

Then...Barnabas Waxed Bold: Encouraging Men And Women To Be Bold

Tony Edwards

It does not take but a casual glance at society to see we live in troubled and uncertain times. A battle is being waged and “Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh” (2 Cor. 10:3; NKJV). No, the battle being waged is one that stems back to the fall of man in the Garden of Eden and it is spiritual. In Genesis 3:15, God foretold of a great warfare that would embody the human race. This warfare would be between the offspring of Satan and the offspring of God. And throughout the ages time has shown that our conflict is “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12).

There is no doubt the Christian life is a fight. We face a never-ending struggle against wickedness that takes many forms, all of which are designed to silence any opposition. Every day we are bombarded with sin. In religion, we fight against false teachers and worldliness. In the world, we face a constant battle against immoral acts pushed on us, against our will, such as homosexuality, abortion, and the like. And

whenever the children of God seek to stand and speak out against these immoral acts, they are threatened and forced to be silent. Aside from dealing with religion and the world, an even more formidable foe lies closer than we know. C. H. Spurgeon wrote,

I could fight the devil; I could overcome every sin that ever tempted me, if it were not that I had an enemy within. Those Diabolians within do more service to Satan than all the Diabolians without. As Bunyan says in his Holy War, the enemy tried to get some of his friends within the City of Mansoul, and he found his darlings inside the walls did him far more good than all those without. Ah! Christians, thou couldst laugh at thine enemy, if thou hadst not thine evil heart within; but remember, thine heart keeps the keys, because out of it are the issues of life. And sin is there. The worst thing thou has to fear is the treachery of thine own heart.

That is so true. We are at war from the inside out.

However, we can overcome, and we must. Overcoming our own shortcomings is a given because we are taught to do this from day one of our Christian journey. But the area I would like to focus on is overcoming fear and shame when it comes to standing for the Lord.

One thing that will enable us to overcome is courage, courage to be bold for God. You see, it takes great courage to continue in the faith. Much of the time it is easier to disobey God than to obey him. Seeing we constantly live in a world

where the opposition is dead set on silencing the child of God, avoiding confrontation is much easier than facing it. But as Edmund Burke once said, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.” Jesus never promised us a bed of roses. We are in a fight, and at times, it will be brutal. “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). This persecution, true enough, is sometimes hard to bear. However, we need to be bold and stand for our faith, come what may. Thus, I would like to encourage you to be strong and courageous.

Paul And Barnabas Waxed Bold

Paul and Barnabas were relatively close as companions in their work for the Lord. While Paul had already been called to preach to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15), Barnabas, at this point, was now being summoned to join the effort. After leaving Antioch in Syria, Paul and Barnabas passed through several cities, taking the opportunity to preach the gospel along the way (Acts 13:5). They finally ended their journey in the city of Antioch in Pisidia, before returning to Jerusalem (Acts 13:14).

Upon arriving at Antioch, they entered the Jewish Synagogue where Paul addressed a willing audience. His message to them was that Jesus came to fulfill the very law you still keep. Paul carries his Jewish audience through a series of historical events, culminating with the fact that Jesus, the Christ, proceeded from David’s lineage and that “By Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).

At the conclusion of the message, the crowd dispersed, and everything seemed ok. However, on the next Sabbath,

trouble came after Paul and Barnabas gave attention to the Gentiles. When the Jews saw this, they were filled with envy (Acts 13:45). The word *envy* comes from a word that means *zeal* and is translated that way six times in the King James Version. It is also rendered one time as *jealousy* and would seem here to have this meaning (Earle 109).

This is very important because those who are angered with us when we stand for God are motivated by some inward feeling of jealousy or such like. The jealousy of these Jews toward Paul and Barnabas was the root cause of their opposition and thus their actions. Acts 13:45 says, “With contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken.” It was at this moment that Paul and Barnabas could have thrown in the towel. It was here they could have given up. It was here they could have said, “This is not worth it, I can serve God, mind my own business, and never have to put up with people like this,” but they did not. They looked to the hill, so to speak, from which their strength came. All their strength came from the Lord (Psa. 121:1-2). Here is where they “waxed bold,” and I want to encourage you to do is wax bold in your faith and never be afraid.

What Being Ashamed Or Timid In Your Faith Shows *Indifference*

Many of the things I am about to describe may not be exactly how you feel on the inside but think about it. When you are ashamed of speaking up for God, what other possible characteristics are you displaying?

Normally when someone is ashamed to speak up for the Lord, he remains silent. This shows indifference. Indifference means something does not matter one way or the other. This attitude expresses the very opposite of what God expects from us. What we are saying is, “God, I realize you are the head of

my life, and I serve you. I know and understand I must obey you, and I know you will judge me one day. However, I don't feel it is necessary for me to have to verbally speak up for You as long as I love You in my heart." This is not Bible faith. This is dead faith.

A good example of this is in Revelation 3:1. The church at Sardis had turned its back on God. They wore a name that they were alive, but their actions showed they were dead. They called themselves Christians, but their actions did not show it. This is how people ashamed of the faith comes across. They say they are Christians, but their actions, when it comes to defending what they claim to love, are contradictory.

In Revelation 3:14-22, Jesus is speaking to the church of the Laodiceans. In this passage He condemns them. His condemnation, however, was not because they were not standing on truth or propagating error. Jesus condemns them because they stood for nothing. They were neutral, or lukewarm, and because of this Jesus said He would vomit them out of His mouth. The word *vomit* here comes from a word (*emeo*) from which we get our English word *emetic*. *Emetic* means an agent that causes vomiting. Jesus was saying that when a person is lukewarm, neutral, or ashamed to proclaim his faith, it causes Him so much discomfort that He has to vomit.

Cowardly Spirit

Being ashamed also suggests a cowardly spirit. Many times people who are afraid to speak up either do not want their feelings hurt, are afraid of hurting someone else's feelings, or are simply just trying to please the crowd. Our goal should never to be to hurt anyone's feelings intentionally, but the fact of the matter is truth can hurt. Sometimes people are afraid of taking a stand because the unpopular view will

mark and taint them as trouble makers, etc...and taking the popular view is just too unbelievable to digest. So they remain quiet, and no one ever knows where they stand. This is not the attitude of the faithful. Cowards are considered by God to be so distasteful that they were promised a place in the lake of fire (Rev. 21:8). We should never worry about whom we are going to offend or whether or not we will be liked. Paul said, "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

Be Willing To Be Hated For God

No one likes to be hated; it is just not something we want to live with. I understand this and God does, too, to a certain extent. Hate brought on by sin is wrong and ungodly. We should never lie, gossip, or any other thing like this which will lead people to hating us. Peter said, "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters" (1 Pet. 4:15). But this is a little different than people hating you because you are doing the right thing. Peter goes on in the next verse to say, "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed" (1 Pet. 4:16).

Remember what Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 5:10). The Christian life is not supposed to be easy; it comes with persecution. A good rule of thumb to live by is this: If you have never suffered persecution for your faith, then maybe your faith has not been loud enough. Paul said "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

Being hated for God is sometimes the price we have to pay, which is a far cheaper price than what Jesus paid on the cross for us. At one time Jesus said, "Now brother will deliver

up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake" (Mat. 10:21-22). We must begin to ask ourselves if we are willing to be hated for the sake of the gospel? If we are hated, it is no different from what Jesus faced. In John 15:18 Jesus said, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you."

Source of Strength and Courage

Do not mistake meekness for weakness. *Meekness* simply means strength under control, but it in no way suggests silence or fear. God is the source of strength for His people. As long as you are faithfully carrying out His will, God will always be there to strengthen you. 2 Chronicles 16:9 informs us that, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him." One of my all-time favorite sections of Scripture is Isaiah 40:28-31:

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

In this passage the children of Israel were asserting that God was nowhere to be found in their difficult situation and that it seemed like He did not even care. They did not feel as Moses and Israel of old felt when they said, “The Lord is my strength and song” (Exo. 15:2). Therefore to reassure them, Isaiah reminded them God was there, but they might not fully understand how He works. His conclusion to them was “Wait on the Lord” and in due time, you shall receive the strength you need to endure.

The reason God could give Israel strength is because he is the source of strength. God never wavers or gets tired. He never becomes discouraged like you and I do. To receive strength from God, we must seek and ask for it. 1 Chronicles 16:11 says “Seek the Lord and His strength.” And when the moments of dismay and fear set in, remember, “Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isa. 41:10).

Be Strong and Courageous: Stand Up For The Lord

A dreadful tale attaches itself to a very popular hymn we sing. In 1858, shortly after preaching at a hugely successful mission in Philadelphia, the evangelist and abolitionist Dudley Atkins Tyng visited a barn on his farm. Stretching out to pat a mule that was working a machine shelling corn, his sleeve caught in the cogs and tore off his arm. Hours later he was discovered, slowly bleeding to death. In his last moments, he whispered to one of his assistants, George Duffield (1818-88): “Tell them to stand up for Jesus.”

Duffield went sadly home and wrote the hymn as a tribute, which he read out as part of his next sermon. The words of the old hymn go like this:

Stand up! Stand up for Jesus!
Ye soldiers of the Cross;
Lift high his royal banner,
It must not suffer loss.
From victory unto victory
His army he shall lead,
Till every foe is vanquished
And Christ is Lord indeed.
Stand up! Stand up for Jesus!
The trumpet call obey,
Forth to the mighty conflict
In this his glorious day.
Ye that are men now serve him
Against unnumbered foes:
Let courage rise with danger,
And strength to strength oppose.
Stand up! Stand up for Jesus!
Stand in his strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you
Ye dare not trust your own
Put on the Gospel armour,
Each piece put on with prayer;
Where duty calls or danger
Be never wanting there!
Stand up! Stand up for Jesus!
The strife will not be long;
This day the noise of battle,
The next the victor's song.
To him that overcometh
A crown of life shall be;
He with the King of Glory
Shall reign eternally.

What marvelous words and what a wonderful meaning are found in this song. The lyrics in this song pretty much describe what we must do: stand up for the Lord.

There will always be situations in life which try our souls. Speaking up for our faith, while knowing we are going to be ridiculed, can definitely be tough, but you can do it. Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation" (Rom 1:16). This is the way we must be. We cannot sit around and allow the destroyers of the faith to degrade our God and His Will and say nothing. Quite the contrary, we should use our knowledge of the Word of God to cast "down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:5). John MacArthur once said,

Our enemies are demonic, but the warfare against them isn't waged by commanding them, mapping their physical location, invoking magic words to subdue them, claiming authority over them, or any of the other common tactics some people usually refer to as "spiritual warfare." We are not fighting demons in a face-to-face confrontation, or by spirit-to-spirit conversation, or with voice-to-voice communication. We attack them by tearing down their fortresses of lies... What, precisely, are our weapons? The only power that will destroy such things is the power of truth... "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Eph. 6:17)

God left us here as His mouth piece and He is depending on us to speak. “Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord” (Exo. 14:13), Moses cried to the children of Israel! How bold and courageous was this man!

Boldness was also a characteristic of our Lord. “For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mat. 7:29). He did not hide his faith or allow others to make Him talk only in private. He definitely was not silenced. In John 18:20 Jesus said, “I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing.” The apostle Paul manifested this same boldness, “And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him” (Acts 9:29). Those who watched Peter and John “saw the boldness” they possessed (Acts 4:13). All of these lost their lives because they were bold, but the life they gained was far more glorious.

Conclusion

It is time to step out and stand up for God. It is time to show the people around you that you know God is real and that He has created you to live for Him. Do not care so much about what people think of you to the point where it totally immobilizes you. Stop living in fear. Stop living in shame. Never care more for comfort than sacrifice. Be bold and courageous, fight the good fight of the faith, and lay hold on eternal life. God bless you.

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CHAPTER 22

Encouraging Those Who Are Grieving: Comforting Others With The Comfort That We Ourselves Have Received Of God

Keith A. Mosher, Sr.

The loss of anything begins what is now called the “grief process” and all, if they have not already, will feel the sting of such losses in life. The greatest losses, of course are of loved ones; but one may lose one’s keys or one’s job or go through the terrible pain of a family breakup. Loss brings individualistic sorrow to each family member; yet it is a kind of pain that can be shared, especially by Christians. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2; KJV). And since a loss is tolerated differently according to an individual’s personality, age, spirituality, and intellect, the advice in this essay is to be considered general and to be adapted for each particular need.

Discussed here will be an exegesis of 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 and the general characteristics of those who grieve; the “phases” of the grieving process; the effects of grief; some suggestions as to what to do when grief enters the home; and some common myths about grief. One has said that, “On occasion one should let himself be sad, for there is good reason for it” (Wolfelt, “Working Through Grief”).

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-5

In his second inspired epistle to the Corinthians, Paul wrote:

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. (2 Cor. 1:3-5)

The terms *comfort*, and *consolation*, in the above verses are both translated from the same Greek word, *parakleesis* (Wigram and Winter). The word in the original is a compound of *para* (beside) and *kaleo* (to call) and literally means “to call beside.” The primary meaning of *parakleesis* is encouragement or exhortation or appeal. But Bauer also gives comfort or consolation as a third meaning and suggests that such comfort from God is “inexhaustible” (Bauer, “Parakleesis”). When a brother or sister in Christ is suffering, and especially when that one is grieving, there needs to be one who can be “called beside” to offer encouragement and comfort to the one who is hurting. In fact, Paul commanded that Christians “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

Coffman, in commenting on 2 Corinthians 1:3 wrote: “Inherent in Paul’s statement here is the fact that only those who have suffered are able to comfort others” (307). The Bible student should also realize that the source of all real comfort

is God for all other human effort is superficial. The true effort to comfort is related to one's understanding of the sufferings of Christ who was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3b). Paul's deduction from understanding the extent of Jesus' suffering and the true source of comfort was: "But whether we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; or whether we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which worketh in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer" (2 Cor. 1:6; ASV). Those who suffer loss and who are also God's children are psychologically prepared to help others endure grief.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GRIEF

"Grief is an important, normal response to the loss of any significant object or person." The one grieving feels deprivations, anxiousnesses, doubts, loss of spiritual vitality, and even loss of enthusiasm (Collins 411). It is important to note that any loss can bring about grief, but the emphasis in this essay is on the grief experienced because of the death of a loved one.

No one can make death into something beautiful simply because death is an *enemy* (1 Cor. 15:26). Christians can take comfort in the certainty of the resurrection, but such knowledge does *not* soften the pain of losing someone who is loved (cf. 1 The. 4:13-18). The psalmist wrote: "My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word" (Psa. 119:28). God's Word is realistic about death, describing such as a "shadowy valley" (Psa. 23:4). David was so taken by the experience of grief that he wrote:

For in death there is no remembrance
of thee: in the grave who shall give thee
thanks? I am weary with my groaning; all

the night make I my bed to swim: I water
my couch with my tears. (Psa. 6:5-6)

Jesus Himself was a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” as noted above (Isa. 53:3b).

Because grief is a universal experience, one wonders how non-Christians deal with death for, according to the Bible, the only hope that saves is in Christ (Rom. 8:24). Psychologists who specialize in counseling those who are grief-stricken are designated thanatologists (from the Greek *thanatos*, death; Bauer). Modern psychological efforts to help, interestingly, involve principles that Christ taught. For example, Lindeman insists that:

grief work following a death involves
three big tasks: untangling oneself from
the ties that bind one to the deceased;
readjusting to a new environment; and
forming new relationships. (141-148)¹

Christ experienced deep grief (Mat. 26:38), but He was able to move on by tremendous effort and was then able to complete His mission.

PHASES OF GRIEVING²

A person first confronted with the death of a loved one often experiences anger. This anger can be expressed as shock, denial, or numbness. One may say, “No, this is not happening,” and the mind may block the reality and a resistance to external stimuli occurs. The one grieving may take a temporary time out from the present and with some, physical shock is evident. (Those who have lost loved ones will often have a resurgence of this anger-shock feeling on

an anniversary date, or upon a remembered birthday of the deceased, or just because of a word said.)

Disorganization and confusion often follow the initial shock and preoccupation with the person who died; restlessness, agitation, impatience, and a kind of “going crazy” syndrome can occur. Basic survival needs such as eating and sleeping may often be ignored. Normal pleasures no longer matter and some will play an “I am sick” role to legitimize their feelings. Psychologists have noted that anxiety, fear, panic, and even explosiveness of emotion occur for some.

Loss, emptiness, and sadness usually follow after the funeral for the full sense of loss never comes all at once. In fact, real sadness often occurs long after most would think consolation or comfort was no longer appropriate. A Christian was once told by this author, nearly six months after the Christian’s wife had died, that he seemed to be doing well. The Christian widower responded, “Yes, but you do not see me at night!” Transient thoughts occur on holidays, early mornings, late evenings, in the car, out walking, watching television, and wherever one might be. Sadly, these latter feelings most often get worse before they ever get better.

Memories are the hardest part of grief with which to deal for grieving means living with pain. One has lost a cherished person and isolation most often results. The one grieving withdraws and feels not ready to share that grief with the world. And it is alright to tell others at this point how one feels during this period of bereavement. (Bereavement is a term used to define the state of loss. Grief is the term referring to the reactions to the loss.)

There are phases of grief, but there are no orderly, predictable stages through which one goes and then everything becomes peaceful. In fact, psychologists are now convinced that many of the forms of “mental illness”

have loss as their root, but are “covered by many years and circumstances often unnoticed” (Wolfelt, Seminar). In fact, many studies have observed the bereaved in terms of stress-related illnesses:

Colin Murray Parkes (1960-1970, England) noted increased doctor visits with symptoms such as abdominal pain, breathing difficulties, and so forth in the first six months following a death. Ward and Bunch (1976) found a five times greater risk of suicide in teens following the death of a parent. (188)

There is normal grief and pathological grief. The former is a good thing, but the latter can so delay recovery that life is impossible. Engel, in fact, insists that pathological (extremely prolonged) grief is a disease (18-22). There are a number of controls on grief such as a person’s beliefs, personality, social status, and the circumstances surrounding the deceased’s death. Therefore, it is impossible to list typical grief patterns, but It is right to say that for some death hits harder than for others.

EFFECTS OF GRIEF

Doss describes grief as “a deprivation experience in which the griever must adjust to a significant loss” (82). However, Parkes views grief as a search (187-201). Again, differing psychological analyses indicate similarities and so some common effects of grief are mentioned here.

The three most commonly observed reactions to grief are crying (an

expression which releases tension), restlessness (sleeplessness included here), and depression. As noted above, there are a multitude of physical symptoms such as “exhaustion, weakness, shortness of breath, indigestion, loss of appetite or sometimes an increase in eating, anxiety, feelings of inner emptiness, guilt, anger, irritability, withdrawal from others, forgetfulness, declining interest in sex, dreams about the deceased, nightmares, errors in judgment, and feelings of loneliness.” (Collins 417-418)

One unusual effect of grief is that some mourners take on and begin to show some of the characteristics of the deceased person. Lewis noted that grief’s effects “come in waves and rarely are they all present at the same time” (66-67). As the months pass, such effects tend to fade, but they can revive, as noted above, with an unexpected intensity.

Normal grief is a “difficult, long-term process of healing, which needs no special help; it takes care of itself and with time the mourner heals and recovers” (Freese 85). The most widely available sources of any needed help are family, friends, ministers, and physicians who can understand and care. Helpers, however, must learn their roles. The nature of one’s relationship to the griever, the nature of the death, and the spiritual nature of the griever are pertinent to how one helps. One never insists, “I know what you are going through,” since grieving is unique to each. One never enters the pit of sorrow with the bereaved by telling of some horrible experience he or she has endured. The thing to do is be there and let the griever know that someone

is thinking about him. Some say, “I am so sorry,” which is not such a bad statement, but the words do not convey real compassion. The one grieving is a lot “sorrier” than the speaker.

People in grief do respond to real support. They may want it. Or they may ignore it. Or they may move against it! {Note how complex grieving is.} And in order to move ahead, only time is a true friend. Time to re-focus on reality, feelings, and faith is necessary. Those who are trying to help the bereaved will be saying, “Tell me about how you feel,” rather than “I know what you are going through.”

Wolfelt says that the true helper wants to know what the experience is like for the griever (“Working”). Also as mundane as it seems, just maintaining a daily routine can be helpful.

Those who observe grief in others should strive to understand, but should not discourage. Helping in practical ways is very useful. Driving the grief-stricken places, doing shopping, making meals, answering phones, going to the funeral home to make arrangements are assisting roles that really help. Just being with the person in a quiet environment is also useful. Allow the one grieving to “tell the story,” if he desires, and without minimizing, (and here is the hard part), assure the bereaved that his emotions are normal! Lewis wrote of grief:

There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me. (1)

GRIEF AND THE HOME

When there are children in the home and someone in the immediate family dies, it is often good to have a “family time” where explanations are made to the children. If it is appropriate, remind the children that the family member who died had a number of years on this earth and had his “chance” to experience life and to prepare for death. His or her death is now one of the experiences that will prepare the living to face the same. However, children especially, must be assured that even parents grieve and that such an experience is absolutely normal.

Wolfelt has written: “Unfortunately, adults sometimes fail to respect properly the individual feelings of children...It is very important that adults carefully nurture the child’s sense of self-worth, especially during times of loss” (“Bereavement and Children” 1). The rituals surrounding death are of great importance for children, and therefore participating with adults in the funeral ritual helps the young to feel a part of the group’s loss.

Too, the reality of death and the behavior of adults are tremendous influences on children. Children do not automatically know why there will be a funeral and allowing them to attend is usually better than forcing them to go. Usually, for small children, an explanation that a funeral is a time for sadness is necessary, but it should also be explained that a funeral is a time for mutual comfort and support. Children who are not allowed to attend the funeral of a loved one often express feelings of being “left out” or of feeling insecure.

Children who are told something like “God needed a grandmother for a boy or girl in heaven, so He took her” often express anxiety, even fear, as to when they will be “taken.” Such misguided and unbiblical information can even

cause long-term, damaging effects on a child's emotional well-being. People die, but God does not "take" their lives as if He were killing them (2 Pet. 3:9)! Children need to know how a loving God has prepared a wonderful place for those who love and obey Him, no matter at what age they die. And children can understand that accidents and illness cause death.

Mourners, even children, have at least five needs with which others can help at times of grieving. First, all are confronted with the fact that the loved one will not return. Those who grieve can be gently led to express this reality. Opportunities to talk about the loved one and the feelings of grief are vital to the healing process.

Second, those who grieve must be encouraged to tolerate the feelings of helplessness, fear, and pain while still incorporating the task of caring for oneself physically. Wolfelt adds: "If avoided, denied, or repressed, the movement toward healing is inhibited." Those who are slow to heal usually "idolize or glorify the person who died" and therefore are unwilling to confront the loss ("Working").

Third, as already indicated above, there is always a need for a supportive, social network. Family and the church are of great value here (Gal. 6:2). The goal is to help the one grieving to transfer his thoughts of the deceased from "presence" to "memory." Mourners sometimes feel that they are being disloyal to the loved one by treating him or her as a memory. This transition in thinking involves many aspects and needs understanding from others as the mourner establishes a new identity.

Fourth, when a loved one dies, the grieving one's perception of the purpose of his life changes. Sometimes mourners even have to re-evaluate their relationship to God because many questions arise when the death occurs.

Fifth, one grieving needs time to “make sense” of what happened. There is a need to renew one’s resources for living. The home can facilitate all of the needs of those who are affected when death arrives.

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT GRIEF

It is evident from the fact that this subject was assigned, that many desire to learn more about the experience of death and grief. Bereavement caregiving is now a college-level study; yet, too many still perpetrate myths regarding grief. Wolfelt noted that identifying these erroneous beliefs was not intended to “condemn...but supportively to encourage such to broaden their understandings of the complex experiences of grief and mourning” (*Thanatos* 25).

Myth number one is that grief and mourning are the same experience. The latter two terms are often used interchangeably, but there is an important distinction.

Grief is the thoughts and feelings that are experienced within oneself upon the death of a loved one. Mourning is the term used to describe what the griever does when he takes the internal experience of grief and expresses it in some fashion. Wolfelt calls mourning “grief gone public” (*Thanatos* 26). In the American culture many grieve but few mourn. The message heard often is “cheer up”; “learn to cope”; “keep busy”; and grieving is thus done in isolation and never in the presence of loved ones. (Those who remember how Jacqueline Kennedy was in public will be familiar with American practices.) Grief and mourning are much more than words. The suggestion here is that since one can do both, both are gifts from the Creator. One should go ahead and mourn and be happy that one can!

Myth number two is that there is an orderly and predictable progression in the grief process. Since this subject

was mentioned earlier, it will suffice to note here, again, that **all** grieving is individualistic. One severe consequence of supposing some law-driven process is that the mourner is often told how he should be reacting when in fact no one knows how another should feel or act given the permanence of death. Wolfelt noted that:

Just as people die in different ways, people mourn in different ways. Expecting anything less would be to demonstrate a lack of respect for the uniqueness of the person. Teach me about your grief and I will be with you. As you teach me I will follow the lead you provide me and attempt to be a stabilizing and empathetic presence. (*Thanatos* 26)

The goal of a caregiver then is not to move the griever through the process, but to listen and to be taught what the other is experiencing.

Myth number three is that it is best to evade grief rather than embracing it. Unfortunately, in western culture, especially in America, mourners do not give themselves permission nor receive permission from others to grieve.

Stoic philosophers, as Zeno, taught their disciples not to mourn in the belief that self-control was the appropriate response to sorrow (Collins 425). The fact that “Jesus wept” at a funeral is Deity’s response to the Stoic philosophy (John 11:35). Yet, today, many carry on the stoic philosophy of “self-control.” One of the reasons that the question arises about how long grief lasts relates to this society’s impatience with grief and the desire to move away from mourning as did the ancient Stoics.

“People who continue to express their grief outwardly are often viewed as ‘weak,’ ‘crazy,’ or ‘self-pitying.’ The common message is “shape up and get on with your life” (Wolfelt, *Thanatos*, 27). The consequence of stoicism is that many view grief as something to get over rather than something to be experienced. Wolfelt adds the following:

The result of these kinds of messages is to encourage the repression of the griever’s thoughts and feelings. Refusing to allow tears, suffering in silence, and “being strong,” are thought to be admirable behaviors. Many people in grief have internalized society’s message that mourning should be done quietly, quickly, and efficiently.

Returning to the routine of work shortly after the death of someone loved, the bereaved person relates, “I’m fine,” in essence saying, “I’m not mourning.” Friends, family, and co-workers often encourage this stance and refrain from talking about death. The bereaved person, having an apparent absence of mourning, (having moved away from their grief instead of toward it) tends to be more socially accepted by those around him or her.

However, this type of collaborative pretense surrounding grief does not meet the emotional needs of the bereaved person. Instead, the survivor is likely to feel further isolated in the experience

of grief, with the eventual onset of the “going crazy syndrome.” Attempting to mask or move away from the grief results in internal anxiety and confusion. With little, if any, social recognition related to the pain of the grief, the person often begins to think their thoughts and feelings are abnormal. As a matter of fact, the most frequent initial comment of grieving persons at our Center for Loss and Life Transition in Colorado is the statement, “I think I’m going crazy.”

Our society encourages people to move prematurely away from their grief instead of toward it. If we want to help bereaved people we must remember that it is through the process of moving toward pain that we move toward eventual healing. (Thanatos 27)

Myth number four is that one’s goal after a death is to overcome or cope (manage) with grief. People comment that another “should be over it now.” All persons are changed by grief so that speaking of a resolution of grief is ludicrous. No one returns to “normalcy” (Parkes 188). For a mourner to be told or to assume that his life will be exactly as it was before the death is not only unrealistic but is also potentially damaging (Wolfelt, *Thanatos*, 27).

Myth number five is that tears of grief express weakness. (One should recall here that Jesus wept at Lazarus’ grave-John 11:35.) Some say to the mourner, “Tears will not bring him back,” or “He would not want you to cry.” Crying is God’s way

of allowing the release of tension, and most mourners report feeling better after crying (Wolfelt, *Thanatos*, 28).

CONCLUSION

Grief cannot and should not be prevented. There are some recognizable phases of grief such as shock, disorganization, and sadness for death is an enemy with sting (1 Cor. 15:55). Grief can cause psychological and physiological changes and eventually enters every home.

Many myths have arisen, in western culture especially, about grief. Dispelling such seems to be a worthwhile goal since grief is very individualistic. When survivors show no sense of grief, it is possible that there was no close relationship with the deceased. But it is also possible that the grieving process is being avoided so that the mourner does not appear “weak” to friends and family. Such avoidance can and has led to pathological grief and this latter does need prevention.

Therefore, long before death occurs, healthy Christian attitudes and honest discussion should take place between parents and children. Any relationships that need mending such as guilt, anger, jealousy, bitterness, competitiveness, or any other can and should be cared for in the here and now. Building friendships and involving oneself in fulfilling activities often soften the blows of death. And nothing takes the place of educating oneself about death, dying, and grief so that one can comfort another.

NOTES

1. “Grief-Work,” mentioned in the manuscript, is a term coined by Sigmund Freud and is just what it says: the task of mourning. It is a matter of rethinking, re-feeling, and reworking the same old emotional problems. What emerges is a “new” mourner not a grief-free individual (Freud, vol. 4).

2. The information in the section on phases of grief is adapted from a website produced by Barry Greenwald who, in turn, was referencing Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' book, *On Death and Dying*. The "steps of grief" have become so universally recognized, however, that no special effort is made here to document each sentence.

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CHAPTER 23

Encouraging Young People To Remember Their Creator

Ben Giselbach

Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth,
Before the difficult days come,
And the years draw near when you say,
“I have no pleasure in them
(Ecc. 12:1; NKJV)

I believe the most critical time period for the Lord’s Church to captivate the heart of a person is between age of 11 and 21 years old. Right now, in the year 2013, this age group is called the “Millennials” (Horovitz). While the dates vary, most researchers say this generation was born between the years 1982 and 2004. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this age group is that it is the first generation to be influenced drastically by the internet and social media. Technology has changed how Millennials think in a very deep and fundamental way. I believe they are different from previous generations in both a good way and a bad way.

In this essay I am not focusing on non-Christians or young people who were not raised in the Lord’s Church. They cannot “remember” their Creator if they never knew Him in the first place. I am discussing *Christian* young people, or at least young people who were raised in the Church.

A recent study by the Barna Group reports that in the denominational world, 59 percent of Millennials say they have “dropped out of attending church after going regularly.” Fifty-seven percent report being less active than they were at the age of fifteen. Thirty-eight percent say they have or had gone through a period where they “significantly doubted their faith.” Thirty-two percent say they have or had gone through a period when they felt like “rejecting their parents’ faith” (as qtd. in Kinnaman 23).

Is anyone willing to argue that the statistics are not similar within the Lord’s Church today? If you were to examine the average congregation of the Church of Christ, I believe the largest age group you will see missing in attendance are Millennials, specifically in the eighteen to thirty-year-old age range. This is a *huge* problem. **Young people, by in large, are not remembering their Creator.**

If young people—those who have grown up in the church—do not know the joy of being a disciple of Jesus Christ by the time they become independent from their parents, then the odds that they will remember Him later in life is exponentially reduced. Now, while they are living under the roofs of Christian parents, is the time to encourage them to remember their Creator.

How To Encourage Young People To Remember Their Creator

One of the biggest mistakes older people can make is to underestimate the intelligence of young people. This mistake is not new; I believe every generation minimizes the intellectual ability of the upcoming generation. We need to remember that young people are not just smart—they are downright brilliant. I suppose we do not always notice the intelligence of young people because we do not remember

where to look. We fail to ‘put ourselves in their shoes’ and remember what it was like to be their age.

Now is the age when young people want to know why. They are asking things like, “Why should I be a Christian instead of following an Eastern religion?” “Don’t all religions basically say the same thing?” “Why should I believe in God?” “Why should I believe in the concept of *sola scriptura*?” or “Why should I be a member of the Church of Christ instead of being a member of the city’s popular community church?” I am not raising these questions in this essay so they can be answered individually; I am merely illustrating the kinds of questions Millennials are asking right now.

When Millennials ask their parents or church leaders these questions, the worst thing we can give them are insufficient answers. Young people know a lazy or insufficient answer when they hear one and will search somewhere else for a more satisfactory or thorough answer if they need to. They will resort to asking their friends, schoolteachers, and the internet in the hope of finding satisfactory answers.

Right now, Millennials are asking, “*Why* should I remember my Creator?” Many of us misunderstand what they are asking as, “*How* can I remember my Creator?” Then we proceed to give them suggestions such as:

1. Be faithful in your church attendance.
2. Go to a Christian college.
3. Study your Bible every day.
4. Be evangelistic.
5. Remain sexually pure.
6. Guard your entertainment choices.
7. Develop a healthy prayer life.
8. Build relationships at church.
9. Ensure your closest friends are Christians.
10. Be an active and supportive church member.

All of these are great ways to continue remembering the Creator! But they do not adequately answer the question Millennials are asking: They want to know *why* they should remember their Creator, not *how*. There is a communication breakdown between the older and younger generation.

I think we owe it to the next generation to answer their question. We need to tell them *why*.

Here are three reasons why young people need to remember their Creator.

You Have A Creator

Solomon, in Ecclesiastes 12:1, says, “**Remember now your Creator.**”

Young people need to recognize the fact that there is a God. Atheism and Agnosticism, widely taught throughout America’s public classrooms today, are taking a toll. More young people are questioning the existence of God today than in any other era. Indeed, if we wish for our young people to remember their Creator, they need to acknowledge the fact that God exists. But Solomon does not merely use a synonym for God. The emphasis is upon the fact that God is the Creator. God *created* us.

No person has a right to himself. God made us. David declared, “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psa. 139:14). Because God made us, we owe God everything. Paul said, “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Cor. 6:19). To the Athenians, Paul declared,

For in Him we live and move and have
our being, as also some of your own
poets have said, ‘For we are also His

offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. (Acts 17:28-29)

God made you, and He designed you with the intention of being happy. Solomon realized that one can only be genuinely happy if he or she enjoys pleasure the way God intended. He said, "Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes" (Ecc. 7:29). God made pleasure; there is no pleasure apart from God. Satan has convinced man to pervert what God has already designed. Young people must be taught that the only way to enjoy life is by "remembering their Creator."

The most important thing for young people to recognize is the fact that they are accountable to Him. They must acknowledge that (1) there is a God, (2) He made us, (3) we must spend eternity somewhere, and (4) He will be our Judge (2 Cor. 5:10). Without knowing this, young people have no reason to remember their Creator.

The Church Needs You Now

Solomon says, "Remember now your Creator **in the days of your youth.**"

I remember an older woman this past spring telling me how much she wishes she had been more faithful when she was younger, while she had more energy and more physical capability than she does now. How sad it must be to look back at your life and realize you wasted your years when you could have given more time to Christ and His Church.

Young people are searching for significance. They are trying to find identity and purpose. The Church needs to

take advantage of this moment, before Satan does. It is said that people really do not know who they are until they reach the age of 25. Until someone reaches that age, his or her sense of purpose is still being greatly influenced. The Church is needs to be their purpose. The Church needs them, and it needs them now. They should love it like Christ loves it (Eph. 5:25).

One of the worst things older members of the Church can say, though they usually mean well, is, “Young people are the church of tomorrow.” That statement could not be any more false and misleading. Young people are the church of today! Show me a church that does not have any young people, and I will show you a church that is struggling to remain alive.

People are more productive and energetic for the Lord in the days of their youth than they are when they become older. It is significant how much of the Bible was written to young people and about young people. Paul wrote two letters to Timothy who could have been in his late teens to early twenties. Rhoda was a young woman, as were Mary and Martha. The book of Proverbs largely directs young folk to pursue righteousness instead of worldliness. Daniel and his three friends were teenagers. Another great figure of the Bible was the teenage Joseph. Youthful David conquered one of the biggest bullies to ever to walk the earth. All of these young people were experiencing many of the same challenges young people encounter today.

Paul told young Timothy, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). He wanted Timothy to know that as a young man, he played an important role in the church. The church looks to young people as examples because of their vigor and passion to

serve the Lord. Without young people to inject energy into the Church, congregations will start to die numerically.

Young people are the ones who need to pick up the Banner of the Cross and carry it further into battle until they can pass it to the next generation of young people. Paul told Timothy,

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Tim. 2:1-2)

Young people are leaving the church in record numbers. Many have fallen for the lie that says, “Just give them more programs and make the worship experience more youthful.” If that were true, we should just hand out dollar bills to young people as they are leaving the church building. The answer to retaining Millennials is not making the church more physically attractive or ‘fun’ but to give our young people a sense of purpose and identity. The Church needs them.

Following Christ Is The Only Worthwhile Endeavor

Solomon says, “Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, **before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, “I have no pleasure in them.”**

Millennials need to be told that there is no other lifestyle or religion (or lack of religion) that will bring more genuine peace, contentment, and satisfaction than New Testament Christianity. But young people, though they think they know everything about the world, do not know this yet. They do not have the experience of the ‘real world,’ though they crave

it so much. They need to be taught that following Jesus is the only true pathway to success.

A few verses prior, Solomon wrote,

But if a man lives many years, And rejoices
in them all, Yet let him remember the
days of darkness, For they will be many.
All that is coming is vanity. Rejoice, O
young man, in your youth, and let your
heart cheer you in the days of your
youth. Walk in the ways of your heart,
And in the sight of your eyes. But know
that for all these things God will bring
you into judgment. Therefore remove
sorrow from your heart, And put away
evil from your flesh, for childhood and
youth are vanity. (Ecc. 11:8-10)

Earlier, in chapter 2, Solomon wrote,

Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep
from them. I did not withhold my heart
from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced
in all my labor; And this was my reward
from all my labor. Then I on all the works
that my hands had done And on the
labor in which I had toiled; And indeed,
all was vanity and grasping for the wind.
There was no profit under the sun. (Ecc.
2:10-11)

Young people need to remember to make the most of
their lives, because judgment is coming. Yes, God designed

life on earth to be enjoyable, and there is no reason why you cannot live a pleasurable life. But the world's definition of "happiness" is different than the child of God's definition. The truly happy and fulfilled life is found in Jesus Christ (cf. John 10:10).

Being a diligent and faithful disciple of Jesus Christ is not without reward. There is nothing pointless or blind about being a Christian. Jesus said that faithful children of God who dedicate their lives to the Son "shall receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life" (Mat. 19:29). Not a single action done in the name of Christ will be overlooked (Mat. 10:40-42).

The apostle Paul was absolutely certain of an eternal reward. He said,

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.
(2 Tim. 4:6-8)

I believe young people are leaving the church in droves because they do not see many older members who are genuinely living in view of eternity. They see too many people who do not live as though they love God with all their hearts, souls, strengths, and minds (Luke 10:27). They also see too many lukewarm Christians who seemingly do not fear eternal death (Mat. 25:46). "If my elders are not passionate

about eternity,” they think, “why should I be?” Are you, by how you live, contributing to this problem?

Millennials need to see that Christianity is not something that is cold, dead, and lifeless. Christ is the only way to true victory (John 14:6). Christ did not leave us without incentive. In fact, young people have two incentives to remember their Creator; (1) avoiding an eternal (Mat. 25:41) state of never-ending dying (Mark 9:44) in a place of outer darkness (Mat. 8:12) and fire (Mat. 25:46; Rev. 21:8), and (2) being rewarded with a mansion (John 14:3) in the Kingdom of Heaven (Rev. 2:10).

Conclusion

The rate at which young people are leaving the church should be alarming to us. Now, more than ever, we need to be encouraging them to remember their Creator. Before we can tell them ways to safeguard them from unfaithfulness, we need to talk more about the “big picture.” They need to remember their Creator because (1) He exists, (2) His Church needs them, and (3) following His Son is the only worthwhile endeavor because we are all on the doorstep of eternity.

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CHAPTER 24

And They Called Barnabas, Jupiter: Encouraging People To Exalt The Lord Rather Than Men

Robert Jeffries

I continue to count it a great honor and privilege to work with the Southaven Church of Christ. This congregation has been a huge blessing to my family for the past five and a half years. Thank you for being a constant encouragement to us. As we ponder the subject of encouragement, the theme that has been selected for this year's POWER Lectureship deals with *Barnabas: The Man Who Was Nicknamed Encouragement*. The idea of encouragement, in all of its forms, is found about twenty-five times in the Bible. The majority of those are found in the New Testament which lets us know just how important encouragement is to those who belong to Christ. However, if we are going to center encouragement around one individual, Barnabas is the personification of encouragement. After all, the Bible records the following about Barnabas, "And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, *and* of the country of Cyprus" (Acts 4:36; KJV). The word *consolation* is translated as *encouragement* in newer translations. In this study our topic

is how Barnabas encouraged people to exalt the Lord rather than men.

In order for us to address the subject at hand properly, it is extremely important for us to gather a little background information. The text for our study is located in Acts 14:8-14. The Apostle Paul is in the midst of his first missionary journey. Somewhere around ten years has passed since his obedience to the Gospel. Most commentators place the date of this passage around AD 45. John Mark has already left, and it is still before Paul and Barnabas will disagree about his return to the mission team. Paul and Barnabas had preached at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:14-51) and as a result of their preaching, the Jews had become very angry (Acts 13:47; Acts 13:50). This anger would continue as Paul and Barnabas traveled and spent time in Iconium (Acts 14:1-5) and then would ultimately result in the stoning of Paul (Acts 14:19). In the midst of this hatred and anger towards Paul an opposite reaction will take place. The people at Lystra will worship them as gods. For our study, we want to notice four things: (1) The Walking, (2) The Worship, (3) The Word, and (4) The Warning.

THE WALKING

“And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s womb, who never had walked” (Acts 14:8). It is here that we are introduced to a certain condition of a certain man at Lystra. The Bible tells us that he was impotent in his feet. The word *impotent* is an adjective that is defined as “weak, impossible, something that cannot be done.” In essence, Luke records for us that it was impossible for this man to walk and he had been this way since the day he was born. A similar account is found in Acts 3 where Peter heals a lame man at the Beautiful Gate, “And

a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple" (Acts 3:2).

Not only do we note this man's condition, but we can also note his concentration. More than likely this event is taking place at the market or at the gates, "Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him" (Acts 17:17). Incidentally, this also helps us to identify the background of the people to whom Paul is preaching. Paul always made it a practice to take the Gospel's saving message to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:14-16). However, if there was not a synagogue present—which indicated an extremely small number of Jews—then he would take it to the market or the city gates where he could find a Gentile audience." "The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed" (Acts 14:9). Personally, this writer likes the New King James translation of the passage a little better because it makes it clearer for us to understand in today's language, "*This* man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed" (Acts 14:9). As Paul is preaching this man is watching intently, meaning Paul has his full attention. The Bible tells us that he has "faith to be healed"; this is important, but not necessary in every instance to be healed. "But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also *is called* Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, *thou* child of the devil, *thou* enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the

hand of the Lord *is* upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand” (Acts 13:8-11).

Following the lame man’s concentration, we see the command that is given. “Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked” (Acts 14:10). The Apostle Paul speaks up loudly and clearly so that everyone can see and hear what is about to happen.

After the command is given, the man complies with the command. Not only did he stand up, the Bible tells us that he leaped and walked. When we consider what this man did, leaping and walking, both of these require a lot of practice. When we watch a child begin to walk, we find that he does not automatically start walking like he has always known how.” His first steps are going to be very deliberate and shaky. Not so with this man. A man who had never walked is now able to walk and is able to jump like he has been doing it his whole life. It takes a child months, if not at least a year, to feel comfortable enough to jump after learning to walk. What an amazing miracle to say the least! A side note to remember about miracles is that they were instantaneous. They did not just happen gradually; they were immediate in action. If a miracle involving someone’s health took place gradually, someone could say, “Well, that person recovered with medicine or physical therapy.” Make no mistake about it: when a miracle took place, people were amazed.

THE WORSHIP

The people were amazed at what they had just witnessed. “And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men” (Acts 14:11). “To lift

up one's voice" was a show of great excitement. Imagine what they have just witnessed. They want to tell everyone about it. This is front-page news and they want everyone to know what has happened. What message were they telling? They were letting people know that the gods have come down to be with us and have taken on human form. According to some commentators, this was a very common occurrence in Greek mythology.

The crowd's superstitious and even fanatical behavior is hard to comprehend, but some local background throws light on it. About fifty years previously the Latin poet Ovid had narrated in his *Metamorphoses* an ancient local legend. The supreme god Jupiter (Zeus to the Greeks) and his son Mercury (Hermes) once visited the hill country of Phrygia, disguised as mortal men. In their incognito they sought hospitality but were rebuffed a thousand times. At last, however, they were offered lodging in a tiny cottage, thatched with straw and reeds from the marsh. Here lived an elderly peasant couple called Philemon (Not the Philemon of the New Testament) and Baucis, who entertained them out of their poverty. Later the gods rewarded them, but destroy by flood the homes which would not take them in. It is reasonable to suppose both that the Lystran people knew this story about their neighborhood and that, if the

gods were to revisit their district, they were anxious not to suffer the same fate as the inhospitable Phrygians. Apart from the literary evidence in Ovid, two inscriptions and a stone altar have been discovered near Lyrstra, which indicate that Zeus and Hermes were worshipped together as local patron deities. (Stott 230-31)

Their amazement resulted in the assigning of names for Paul and Barnabas. “And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker” (Acts 14:12). Barnabas was assigned the name *Jupiter* which is the Roman equivalent to the Greek god Zeus. Zeus was considered to be the supreme deity, the chief of all gods (Strong, “Zeus”). Paul was given the name Mercurius which is the Roman equivalent to the Greek god Hermes. Hermes was considered to be the messenger of the Greek deities. More than likely, Paul was given this name because he did most of the speaking. Another reason that some have suggested is that Paul was not as physically imposing as Barnabas was (Reese 505-6). “Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence *am* base among you, but being absent *am* bold toward you... For *his* letters, say they, *are* weighty and powerful; but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible... And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling” (2 Cor. 10:1; 2 Cor. 10:10; 1 Cor. 2:3). It is interesting to note that Zeus and Hermes are often linked together in Greek mythology.

Following the assigning of the names comes the adoration of the people. Prior to this point, Paul and Barnabas had not fully understood the Lystrans. “And when the people saw

what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men” (Acts 14:11). The speech they were using was a dialect with which Paul and Barnabas were not familiar. However, the language became loud and clear based upon the actions of the priests. “Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people” (Acts 14:13). They were preparing to worship Paul and Barnabas. Gareth L. Reese suggests that there were two oxen brought, one to be sacrificed to each god. The garlands were wreaths of flowers which were draped over the horns of the victim, just before it was sacrificed (506-7).

THE WORD

“*Which* when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out” (Acts 14:14). Once Barnabas and Paul realize what is taking place, their actions became urgent. To “rent their clothes” was a sign of extreme agitation. Brother Wayne Jackson says that it means “to show the horror of.” To “cry out” was a way to say that they were trying to get the people’s attention to urge them to cease their preparations for a sacrifice to Zeus and Hermes (Reese 508). Paul and Barnabas sought to put a stop to what the Lystrans were about to do.

They would use words to try to influence the understanding of the people. “And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein” (Acts 14:15). Paul was implying to them, we are not gods to be worshipped! We are mere men, just like you (Reese 508).

Following the words they use to influence the people, they would utter words to teach the people. “And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein” (Acts 14:15). What would they preach to them? Some of the newer translations will render that Barnabas and Paul would preach the Good News or the Gospel to them (ESV and NASB). (1) They wanted them to know that Jesus died for them, was buried, and rose again. (2) They wanted them to turn from these vanities. The word *vanity* means “empty, fruitless, useless, profitless, and powerless” (Strong, “Mataios”). The idols they were worshipping had no power to help their soul. When Paul talked about these “vain things,” he was making reference to the animals, the temple, and the flowers (Reese 509). (3) Paul and Barnabas wanted the Lystrans to turn to the living God. The gods they were serving were not the one true living God. Whenever Paul preached, his substance would be the same, but he would vary the presentation. For example, if Paul preached to a Jew, the focus would be upon genealogies, Law, the prophets, and Jesus being the Christ. If he were preaching to the Gentiles, Paul would focus on the one true living God. Why not preach the same exact message to both? You have two groups of people with two completely different backgrounds. The Gentiles were idolatrous people that needed to know about the one true living God. The Jews believed in the God of Heaven, but rejected the Christ. They needed to know what the Old Testament said about this. When Paul and Barnabas were addressing the people at Lystra, they were addressing Gentiles that needed to know about the one true living God. In First Thessalonians, Paul writes about how those

brethren had turned from their polytheistic ways in idolatry and turned to follow the one true living God, “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 The. 1:9). (4) Paul wanted the Lystrans to know that the one true living God created the entire world, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). In doing so, Barnabas and Paul would encourage them to exalt the God of Heaven rather than men.

THE WARNING

To Those Who Look Up To Others: Be careful with your adoration. In today’s society, it is easy to elevate someone so high that it comes across in a worshipful manner. The same can be said religiously. There are some who elevate a preacher, elder, or faithful Christian up in such a way that they are looked at as a god who can do no wrong.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them *which are of the house* of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.

Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.” (1 Cor. 1:10-15)

Paul tells us that over-adoration can lead to: (1) Distraction From Christ and (2) Strife.

To Those Who Are Leaders: You are of like passions. You are not above anyone else. Do not expect others to bow down to you.

To All: Let us be sure that we are serving the one true living God.

He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish *it*. Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth *it*, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth *it*; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth *himself*, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: And the residue thereof he maketh a god, *even* his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth *it*, and prayeth

unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou
art my god. (Isa. 44:14-17)

Mortify therefore your members
which are upon the earth; fornication,
uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil
concupiscence, and covetousness, which
is idolatry. (Col. 3:5)

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CHAPTER 25

Encouraging Husbands And Wives Together As Heirs Together Of The Grace Of Life

David Sproule

Many are the joys and blessings of Christian marriage. Marriage is God's way of producing companionship in life that cannot be enjoyed as a single Christian (making one "complete"). "The Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him'" (Gen. 2:18; NKJV). There is a sense in which each spouse in a Christian marriage is incomplete without the other. When the first husband saw the first wife and was seemingly overwhelmed by how she "completed" him, he exclaimed, "This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23).

Marriage is God's way of propagating the human race. One of the joys of Christian marriage is the opportunity to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28), not merely for the sake of personal fulfillment but to bring forth and raise a "godly offspring" (cf. Mal. 2:15). When we allow the Lord to "build our house," Christian homes will see children as "a heritage from the Lord" and "a reward" with which the Lord has blessed us (Psa. 127:1-5).

Marriage is God's way of providing intimacy as a special bond that cannot be properly enjoyed elsewhere. When God created "male and female" (Gen. 1:27), He ordained that special marriage relationship with these words: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). The sexual intimacy between a man and woman was placed by God within the bonds of marriage to be enjoyed only in the marriage bed (Heb. 13:4; cf. 1 Cor. 7:2-4).

Many are the joys and blessings of Christian marriage—too numerous to be enumerated. However, one joy exceeds all other joys; one blessing surpasses all other blessings. The ultimate joy and blessing of Christian marriage has little to do with this life and much more to do with the next life. Marriage is God's way of preparing Christian husbands and wives for eternity. According to Scripture, Christian couples are "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). What a thought! Let us explore it together!

Becoming An Heir Of The Grace Of Life

Before we can appreciate fully the depth of being heirs together of the grace of life, we must first appreciate the blessing of being an heir at all. When a penitent believer in Christ is baptized in the name of the Lord, Scripture teaches that the Lord causes a number of things to transpire simultaneously as one operation. Upon immersion into Christ, (1) the Lord washes one's sins away with the blood of Jesus (Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5); (2) the Lord bestows a new name (i.e., Christian) upon the saved (Isa. 62:2; Mat. 28:19; Acts 11:26); (3) the Lord adds the saved to His church (Acts 2:41; Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 12:13); (4) the Lord writes the name of the saved in His Book of Life (Heb. 12:23; Rev. 21:27; Phi. 4:3). The list is joyfully long, but all of this transpires

upon one's baptism, in order that one might be reconciled to God and enter a new relationship with Him. What a tremendous thought—to be called a child of God! What an overwhelming contemplation—that my Father might announce about me, “This is My beloved son/daughter, in whom I am well pleased!”

Becoming a child of God brings a host of blessings, the greatest of which is described in Galatians 4:7, “Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then **an heir of God** through Christ” (emp. added DS). To be a child of God is to be an heir of God (cf. Rom. 8:17)! The **glorious inheritance** promised to God's children is a gloriously rich (Eph. 1:18) and eternal (Heb. 9:15) reward (Col. 3:24), that is “incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven” (1 Pet. 1:4). As a part of the family of God, an heir enjoys the full privileges of being called a child, including the immutable and unfailing promise of His inheritance (Heb. 6:17-18; Tit. 1:2).

Upon one's baptism, there is another new relationship into which one enters – a new relationship with Christ! When one is “baptized into His death” (Rom. 6:3), he is “**united together** [*sumphutos*] in the likeness of His death” (Rom. 6:5). Having been “**buried with Him** [*sunthapto*] through baptism” (Rom. 6:4; cf. Col. 2:12), one is “**raised up together** [*sunegeiro*]” with Him (Eph. 2:6; cf. Col. 2:12). Upon one's forgiveness of all trespasses, he is “**made alive together** [*suzoopoieo*] with Christ” (Col. 2:13; cf. Eph. 2:5) and made to “**sit together** [*sugkathizo*] in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). [Notice the repetition of the Greek word *sun*, often used as a prefix in compound words, as a “marker of accompaniment and association” (Bauer), to mean “with” or “together.” The usage of *sun* is introduced here to note one's intimate association with Christ in baptism, and its

usage will be emphasized more later to stress one's intimate association with his/her spouse in marriage.]

While the New Testament affirms Jesus as the Savior, Redeemer, Lord and final Judge, it also depicts Him as Bridegroom and Brother. Interestingly, a Christian is one who is “married to” Christ (Rom. 7:4). (Keep this in mind as we consider “Encouraging Husbands and Wives As Heirs Together of the Grace of Life.”) At the same time, Christians are described as Jesus’ brethren (Heb. 2:11-18; Mat. 25:34-45; Rom. 8:29). Since Christ, the Son of God, is an heir of God (cf. Heb. 1:2), then His brethren, who are likewise children of God, are also “**heirs of God and joint heirs** [*sugkleronomos*] with Christ...that we may also be glorified together [*sundoxazo*]” (Rom. 8:17).

Human words struggle to express the tremendously blessed relationship that ensues when one is baptized. He becomes a son of God, and thus becomes an heir of God the Father. He is joined together with Christ, and thus becomes an heir together with Christ. Before immersion into Christ, there are no blessings (cf. Eph. 1:3) or promises of God (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20) to enjoy. Yet, after immersion into Christ, the blessings and promises to be enjoyed in Christ, as heir of God, are more glorious than this earth can fully know!

Joining Together Two Heirs Of The Grace Of Life

Having considered the magnificent blessing of God bestowed upon those who are joined together to Him in baptism and become His heirs, consider now the magnificence experienced when two of those heirs are joined together. When a male and female are married (Mat. 19:4), Jesus said that “they are no longer two but one flesh,” because “God has joined together” what was once separate (Mat. 19:6). When

a husband and wife get married, they are yoked together (2 Cor. 6:14) by God and bound (Rom. 7:4) to one another.

More specifically, when two faithful Christians (separately heirs of God) are joined together by God, the New Testament depicts them as “**heirs together** [*sugkleronomos*] of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7). The Greek word for *heir* [*kleronomos*] is combined with the Greek prefix for *with, together* [*sun*] to represent those who share an inheritance. This compound Greek word is only found four times in the Greek New Testament and is translated *heirs together, joint heirs* and *fellow heirs*. Romans 8:17, as already noted, speaks of Christians as “joint heirs with Christ.” Ephesians 3:6 speaks of Gentiles as “fellow heirs” of the promise. Hebrews 11:9 speaks of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob being fellow “heirs . . . of the same promise.” And 1 Peter 3:7 (the text for this study) speaks of husbands and wives as “heirs together of the grace of life.”

By definition, a husband and wife cannot be heirs together if one of them is not an heir himself or herself. Just as being heirs together with Christ necessitates being “related” to Christ (i.e., not just being married to Him but having Him as the elder Brother), so for a husband and wife to be heirs together necessitates that they also be “related” spiritually (as brother and sister in Christ). God’s ideal for marriage shines forth in this expression, as it is His desire for an heir of God to marry an heir of God and to become “joint-heirs” (1 Pet. 3:7; ASV).

When two heirs are equally yoked together (equally is redundant in this sentence, as they are, in fact, both heirs), God paints a marvelous portrait of their new relationship with each other. When light marries light, they share a unique **communion** [*koinonia*] with each other (2 Cor. 6:14). When a Christian marries a Christian, they share a

unique **harmony** [*sumphonesis*] with each other (2 Cor. 6:15; NASB). When a temple of God marries a temple of God, they share a unique **agreement** [*sugkatathesis*] with each other (2 Cor. 6:16). What a beautiful portrait of a Christian marriage!

As New Testament Christians, we all share a unique bond with each other, and that bond is carried into a marriage of two New Testament Christians. While the following passages highlight the relationship between all Christians, consider how they are enhanced even more in a Christian marriage. Christians are portrayed as being fitted [or framed, ASV] together [*sunarmologeo*] (Eph. 2:21) and knit [or held, NASB] together [*sumbibazo*] (Eph. 4:16). Reflect on the planning, strength, precision and care that would be necessary to do this with all Christians; then consider how much more special this makes two heirs who are fitted, knit, and held together by God in marriage. As the Greek prefix *sun* further details, a Christian husband and wife are “fellow citizens [*sumpolitēs*] with the saints” of the same kingdom (Eph. 2:19), “fellow-members [*sussomos*] of the body” (Eph. 3:6; NASB), who are “being built together [*sunoi kodomeo*] for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22). Individually, each Christian is a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Collectively, the church, as a body of Christians, is a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:22; 1 Cor. 3:16-17). Matrimonially, a Christian couple, as heirs together of the grace of life, are a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (cf. Mat. 18:20)!

What a blessing it is to join together two heirs of the grace of life. God knew that faithful living in Christ can be a challenge, and God knew that “it is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Thus, in Christian marriage, God has provided a lifelong companion for the Christian walk (cf. Eph. 5:1-17; 1 John 1:7), a lifelong running mate for the

Christian race (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24-27), a lifelong fellow soldier [*sustratiotes*] for the Christian warfare (cf. Eph. 6:10-18). What an awesome God, who knew we would need this to uniquely provide for us in a relationship as heirs together.

Growing Together As Heirs Together Of The Grace Of Life

Holy Writ plainly teaches that, once one becomes an heir of God, he does not automatically remain an heir of God for the rest of his life. Scripture is full of admonitions to “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58), “be faithful until death” (Rev. 2:10), and to continue to “walk in the light as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7). In addition, Scripture continually warns Christians to “take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12), to “keep oneself unspotted from the world” (Jam. 1:27), and to “be diligent...lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience” (Heb. 4:11). Therefore, when one becomes an heir of God, he must give faithful attention to growing as an heir of God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18), lest he fall and lose his inheritance (cf. 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

The same is true for the Christian husband and wife who are joined together by God and become heirs together of the grace of life. They will not automatically remain heirs together without giving faithful attention to growing together as heirs. (Attention will be given again in this section to Greek words with the *sun* prefix, to emphasize the “together” or “joint” aspect of this growth.)

Heirs together can only grow together if they actually live together.

Such is a part of the instructions that Peter gives in the first part of 1 Peter 3:7. A husband and wife living together [*sunoikeo*] may seem an obvious requirement to faithful

and seasoned Christians, but it is not necessarily a universal practice (even among some Christians). For a variety of reasons, many husbands and wives today do not dwell together as husband and wife on a regular basis. (This can include coming together [*sunerchomai*] sexually as husband and wife, as addressed in 1 Corinthians 7:5, but it is not limited to only that aspect of the husband-wife relationship.) Marital conflict, separation, and divorce are leading causes of married couples not living together. However, there are other seemingly innocent reasons. The travel that is often required in the pursuit of their own careers keeps husbands and wives separated for days and weeks at a time. For some, it may not be out-of-town travel but long days and late nights in the office that keep them apart. Other couples intentionally seek to maintain a level of independence from their spouse, which keeps them separated in space, time, and heart. So, as consideration is given to growing together as heirs together, it first must be emphasized (and not overlooked) that heirs together must live together.

Secondly, heirs together can only grow together if their hearts are “knit together in love” (Col. 2:2).

This desire of the Lord for Christians in Laodicea and Colosse is certainly His desire for two Christians joined together in marriage. What a beautiful picture of the hearts of a married couple (from the newly married to those married for half a century)! Knit together [*sumbibazo*] is such a vivid way to show two hearts that have become so entwined and enmeshed with one another that it is difficult to discern any distinction or separation in them. The thread holding them together is what makes that distinction such a challenge—“knit together in [*agape*] love.” When two hearts simultaneously set the needs of the other above their own needs and then unselfishly and unconditionally seek to meet

those needs (i.e., the meaning of *agape* love), they will be tightly knit together in love and will grow together as heirs together, with “the increase that is from God” (Col. 2:19). Heirs together must have their hearts knit together.

Thirdly, heirs together can only grow together if they are “perfectly joined together in the same mind” (1 Cor. 1:10).

The health and growth of the church in Corinth was tied directly to its united devotion to the mind (or word) of Christ. So also, the health and growth of a Christian marriage is tied directly to its united devotion to the word of Christ. “Perfectly joined together” is a compound word (with the Greek prefix *kata* rather than *sun*) which means “put in order, restore... put into proper condition” (Bauer, “Katartizo”) and “to be reconciled in one and the same Spirit, to maintain harmony between one another” (Spicq 274). The “proper condition” or “Spirit” or “harmony” is not based on either of the partners in the marriage relationship but upon a higher standard. The entire verse reads, “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). Unity in the church is critical! Unity in marriage is equally critical! And, the unity (in both the church and marriage) is founded not in man but in Christ and the authority of His divine will! A Christian couple will grow together when they devote themselves equally to a “thus saith the Lord” for all they do and an equal respect for His authority in all matters. Heirs together must be “perfectly joined together in the same mind.”

Fourthly, heirs together can only grow together if they pray together (Acts 12:12).

In Acts 12, the church body was “gathered together [*sunathroizo*] praying” (Acts 12:12). If Christian husbands

and wives are going to grow as heirs together, they must gather together to pray. Paul urged Christians to “strive together [*sunagonizomai*] with me in prayers to God” (Rom. 15:30). Paul was grateful to other Christians because they were “helping together [*sunupourgeo*] in prayer for us” (2 Cor. 1:11) that the Lord might deliver them. Think about this. How often do Christian couples strive together in prayer? How often do Christian couples help together in prayer? Heirs together must pray together.

A Christian husband and wife will not automatically remain heirs together if they do not mutually give their utmost attention to growing in their love for the Lord and for each other. As Paul desired for his relationship with the Roman brethren, so it can be with two heirs who are growing together, that they can “be mutually encouraged [*sumparakaleo*] by each other’s faith” (Rom. 1:12; ESV).

Serving Together As Heirs Together Of The Grace Of Life

One of the most difficult challenges that a faithful Christian can face is being married to one who is not a faithful Christian. The burning desire of the heart of a faithful Christian is to serve the Lord, and when that desire is not reciprocated in one’s closest companion on this earth, that can make serving the Lord extremely difficult, and often leads the burning desire in that faithful Christian’s heart to be weakened, if not completely extinguished.

However, when an heir of God is married to an heir of God, serving the Lord together ought to become much easier. There should be a mutual desire, a mutual understanding, a mutual encouragement, a mutual effort, a mutual joy, a mutual completion. As Scripture depicts married couples as being yoked together, they ought to be able to do more for the Lord in His field **together** than they ever could alone (just

as two oxen in a yoke can accomplish more together than one of them alone). In fact, because they are yoked together, heirs together must serve together in order to both remain heirs together.

Heirs together must worship together!

If the eternal inheritance promised to all heirs involves honoring and praising our God and Father for all eternity, how and why would these heirs not seek every opportunity to honor and praise their God and Father during life on this side of eternity? Thus, it should not surprise us that the New Testament places great emphasis on Christians assembling together to worship God. (It should be noted that the New Testament places a great emphasis on Christians assembling together, even when that assembly was not for the purpose of worship. The Greek word *sunago*, often translated *gathered together* is used interchangeably for worship assemblies and non-worship assemblies. For occasions when the church was assembling [*sunago*], but apparently not for or limited to worship, read Matthew 18:20; Acts 2:46; Acts 4:31; Acts 5:42; Acts 11:26; Acts 14:27; and Acts 15:30. Christians today must also place a priority on gathering together with the church [cf. Mat. 6:33]).

The Greek New Testament uses at least three different words with regard to the church assembling together to worship and all three of them (compound words) contain the Greek prefix *sun*. The Greek *sunago* is used to refer to the heirs of God coming together or gathering together to worship (Acts 20:7; cf. John 20:19; 1 Cor. 5:4). Seven times in the book of First Corinthians, Paul used the word *sunerchomai* to instruct the church how to properly conduct itself when it would come together to worship (1 Cor. 11:17-18; 1 Cor. 11:20; 1 Cor. 11:33-34; 1 Cor. 14:23; 1 Cor. 14:26). The Hebrew writer exhorted his readers not to forsake “the

assembling [*episunagoge*] of ourselves together” (Heb. 10:25). Heirs together should not only long to worship together, but God wants them to know that, in order to serve Him faithfully, they must worship together.

Consider that in the worship assembly of the saints, a Christian couple must truly worship together. That means more than going to church together. That means more than sitting on a pew together. That means to engage their minds, hearts, and tongues **together** to honor and praise their God and Father. As they sing, they must sing to one another (cf. Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). As they commune, they must commune together (cf. 1 Cor. 11:17-34; Acts 20:7). As they give, they must give together (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Acts 5:9, the right concept when they agreed together [*sumphoneo*]). As they pray, they must pray together (cf. Acts 12:12; Jam. 5:16). As they hear the word of God, they must hear the word of God together (cf. Acts 13:44; Acts 20:7-9).

Heirs together must evangelize together!

The primary responsibility of every heir of God is to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Thus, the primary responsibility of heirs together is to take the gospel to the world together. In John 4, when Jesus preached to His disciples about seeing souls even in Samaria, He said, “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest?’ Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” (John 4:35). In the next verse is where the “together” part in evangelism is emphasized, “And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together” (John 4:36). When heirs evangelize together, they are able to rejoice together. In the book of Philippians (as well as other places in his writings), Paul underscored mutual

participation in the gospel. As he exhorted these Christians, take the same exhortation and apply it to Christian couples (heirs together) today. “Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together [*sunathleo*] for the faith of the gospel” (Phi. 1:27). And “These women who labored with me [*sunathleo*] in the gospel” (Phi. 4:3). As athletes together, side-by-side, heirs together must evangelize together.

Heirs together must labor together!

The Christian life is not intended to be a slothful or lazy life (cf. Rom. 12:11; Mat. 25:26). The Lord used words like *labor*, *toil*, *work*, *strive* and *serve* to emphasize the strong determination that would be necessary to be an heir of God. One of the great joys for all Christians who serve is that they are not required to serve alone. One of the great joys for Christian couples is that they are not required to serve alone. There is emphasis throughout the New Testament on this labor and service being “together” (which has been detailed in numerous points throughout this lesson already). The expression *fellow workers* or *fellow laborers* (translated from the Greek *sunergos*) is found more than a dozen times in the New Testament (Rom. 16:3; Rom. 16:9; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phi. 2:25; Phi. 4:3; Phil. 24). When Christian couples labor together, may they remember that it is “in the gospel of Christ” (1 The. 3:2), and it is “for the kingdom of God” (Col. 4:11), “for the truth” (3 John 8) and “for your joy” (2 Cor. 1:24). Heirs together must labor together.

**Rewarded Together As Heirs Together
Of The Grace Of Life**

Many are the purposes of Christian marriage in the plan of God. Many are the joys and blessings of Christian marriage as designed by God. However, one purpose transcends all other purposes; one joy exceeds all other joys; one blessing

surpasses all other blessings. The ultimate joy and blessing of Christian marriage has little to do with this life and much more to do with the next. Marriage is God's way of preparing Christian husbands and wives for eternity. According to Scripture, Christian couples are "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). What a thought!

As heirs together, the promise of God is that we shall, one day, "be caught up together...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 The. 4:17). Imagine the day when you will be caught up together in the clouds with your Christian mate to meet the Lord in the air.

As heirs together, the promise of God is that we shall, one day, "be glorified together" with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Imagine the day when you will be glorified together with your Christian best friend.

As heirs together, the promise of God is that we shall, one day, "live together with Him" (1 The. 5:10). Jesus taught that "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Mat. 22:30), so we know that the husband-wife relationship will not continue into eternity. However, after spending decades on this earth as heirs together, aiming for that eternal home together, imagine the day when you will live together with your best Christian friend for all eternity.

May God help us as Christian husbands and wives to so live as heirs together (growing together and serving together) that we may be rewarded together with the grace of eternal life!

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CHAPTER 26

When They Had Fulfilled Their Ministry: The Encouragement That Comes From Seeing A Task Fulfilled

Jason Rollo

Acts 12:25 reads, “And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, **when they had fulfilled their ministry**, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark” (KJV). The phrase *when they had fulfilled their ministry* will be the subject of our investigation in this lesson. We desire to emphasize the joy and encouragement involved when one completes a task or sees that task to fruition, especially as it relates to the Lord’s work. As a matter of outline, consider the following: (1) **Look Around**—Numerous ministries/opportunities abound; (2) **Look Back**—Great encouragement exists when a work is complete; (3) **Look Forward**—When a work is finished, it is time to seek another; and (4) **Look Up**—Salvation is surely worth all the labor and toil.

To understand Acts 12:25, the reader must go back to Acts 11:22-30. The service or ministration under consideration deals with the sending of financial aid to the impoverished saints “which dwelt in Judea” (Acts 11:29). The reason is given in Acts 11:28, namely the great dearth or famine occurring in the days of Claudius Caesar. Just as the church which was in

Jerusalem had sent forth Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 11:22), so now the church in Antioch would send assistance back to the elders of the Lord's church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30). It is in Acts 12:25 that the completion of this specific ministry, by the hands of Barnabas and Saul, is referenced. With the above thoughts in mind, let us draw lessons from Acts 12:25.

LOOK AROUND—NUMEROUS MINISTRIES/ OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

The phrase under consideration (i.e., *when they had fulfilled their ministry*) is deserving of study. The term *they* obviously refers to Barnabas and Saul. Saul, better known as the Apostle Paul, and Barnabas (famous for his encouraging nature, Acts 4:36) were both great soldiers of the Cross. The words *had fulfilled* are self-explanatory, meaning that Paul and Barnabas completed their work regarding the specific task given them. *Thayer's Greek Dictionary* says of the word, "To make full, to fill up, to fill to the full, to render full, to complete, to consummate, to bring to pass, to accomplish" ("Pleroo"). Thus, Barnabas and Saul did **not** leave the work undone, but instead they saw the task to fruition—they completed it! The Greek word for *ministry* is from a rather well-known family of words to Bible students. It is the term *diakonia*. Regarding this specific term *ministry*, the same researcher (Thayer) says, "Service, ministering, especially of those who execute the commands of others, those who help meet need by either collecting or distributing of charities." The ASV (American Standard Version) says, "when they had fulfilled their ministration." The ESV (English Standard Version) has it, "when they had completed their service." One thing is clear: Paul and Barnabas were trustworthy with their work. They completed their work. They did not "put [their]

hand to the plough, and [look] back” (Luke 9:62). They had a specific work to do and they did it.

Likewise, there is much work to do today in the Lord’s church. Pulpits need filling with sound and solid men (2 Tim. 4:2), elderships need placing (Acts 14:23), children need training (Deu. 6:7-9; Eph. 6:1-4), mission fields need workers (John 4:35), local communities need evangelizing (Acts 16:9; Acts 17:16), corporate worship services need spiritual and Scriptural minded active participants (John 4:24; Psa. 111:1), benevolent causes need supporting (Acts 11:28-30; Gal. 6:10), elders (but also their spouses, as well as deacons, preachers, etc.) need encouraging in their wonderful work (Exo. 17:12; 1 The. 5:12-13) and a million similar examples could also be listed. As the famous church song says, “There is much to do, there is work on every hand.” While we must never compromise sound doctrine (Jer. 6:16), we must also never be guilty of destroying each other over different works within the kingdom (Gal. 5:15). Again, we are not talking about liberal (or anti) works, wherein brethren distort the truth and confuse the masses. No, in those cases, we must wield the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17) and wage spiritual battle (2 John 9-11; Rom. 16:16-18). Compromise is not an option (Neh. 6:1-4; Jude 3; Phi. 1:17)! However, when it comes to good (sound) works, brethren should forever realize that there is more work to do than can ever be done. We must never be guilty of the works of the flesh such as being “full of envy” (Rom. 1:29) or of those mentioned who are “lovers of their own selves” (2 Tim. 3:2). Jealousy, selfishness, and bitterness have no place in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:31-32). Instead the Christian (like a qualified elder) should be a “lover of good men” (Tit. 1:8; KJV) (more correctly translated “a lover of that which is good”—including both men and every good work) . Perhaps James 3:13-18 and 1 Corinthians

13:1-8 should be remembered and studied more often. In fact, a Bible search of the phrase *every good work* will quickly demonstrate the attitude of the Apostle Paul concerning his brethren and their various works/ministries. Perhaps Titus 3:1 summarizes his viewpoint well when it says that brethren should be “ready to every good work.”

Therefore, let us find good works and be about the Father’s business (i.e., Barry Hatcher’s work with **Fishers of Men/Indonesia**, Tom Wacaster’s work writing various sound commentaries and teaching in Russia and India, **World Video Bible School’s** (WVBS) work in producing tremendous evangelistic media for the brotherhood, **Gospel Broadcasting Network** (GBN) for its work in television, **Tullstar** for its work in recording various lectureships and offering sound CDs and DVDs to the brotherhood, **Online Academy of Bible Studies** (OABS) for its work in bringing various meetings and lectureships to the web in archive as well as in live streaming format, **House to House/Heart to Heart**, The various sound lectureships offered, The solid preacher training schools available (i.e., MSOP, SWSBS), etc.—Certainly the list could go on and on for pages!) When works are good (but different in their scope from another sound work—but still sound), then let us support them. If they turn corrupt, then we should reject them (1 The. 5:21).

LOOK BACK—GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT EXISTS WHEN A WORK IS COMPLETE

Pause for a moment and reflect back on a time when you have completed a difficult task. Are you able to remember a day that you spent working (perhaps manual labor—although mental labor is just as exhausting (cf., Ecc. 12:12; 2 Tim. 2:15)) the entire day and at the end of the day you were completely wiped out? Did it not feel good as you reflected

back on the accomplishments of the day? Certainly it did. At the time (while actually doing the work), it likely seemed difficult and cumbersome, but after the journey the sweet joy of accomplishment brought you encouragement and a satisfied feeling of joy, did it not? The same is true in spiritual matters (Acts 12:25). We must remember, however, that first we must work—then—we find encouragement—after—the work is complete. Jesus said, “I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). Jesus is our example (1 Pet. 2:21). Therefore, we, too, should work “while it is day.” In other words, we should be looking for opportunities to do good (Gal. 6:10; Acts 10:38). We must redeem the time we have today, not tomorrow (Jam. 4:13-15; Eph. 5:15-17; Col. 4:5).

Now, after a specific ministry or task is completed, one should take encouragement in said accomplishment. Often times, we do not take the mental look-back that we should to encourage ourselves and/or each other. While we cannot rest on our laurels, there is certainly nothing wrong with finding encouragement from completing a godly work. In fact, Acts 12:25 proves exactly this point. Notice also Acts 13:25 concerning the work of John the Baptizer. It begins, “And as John fulfilled his course.” What was the course/ministry/duty/work of John? It was to “prepare...a highway for our God” (Isa. 40:3). This John did beautifully and humbly (Luke 7:24-29; Luke 16:16). Without doubt accomplishing his task brought him joy/encouragement in knowing that he did the work he was given to do. Along this same line, consider the example given regarding the completion of Paul and Barnabas’s first missionary journey. Acts 14:23-28 reads:

And when they had ordained them
elders in every church, and had prayed

with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples. (emp. mine JR)

The Holy Spirit has given us a wonderful description of the exact topic we are currently studying, namely the encouragement and joy realized through bringing a task to fruition or completion. The above example shows them being given a ministry (i.e., “to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God”). It shows them completing the specific assignment (i.e., “for the work which they fulfilled”). Equally important, it shows the brethren, including those sent and those who sent them, discussing, encouraging each other, and rejoicing over the completion of the work (i.e., “And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them...And there they abode long time with the disciples”).

In similar fashion, we should also rejoice and be encouraged when a certain goal is accomplished within a specific church work. Just as the entire book of Philippians

(a book written from prison, nonetheless) is about rejoicing in the Lord (Phi. 4:4), so brethren today should be joyous and happy people—especially as it relates to completing works for our King! As Hebrews 12:12 says, “Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.” The book of Hebrews deals with brethren who were depressed and returning to Judaism. The inspired writer charges them, “But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions” (Heb. 10:32). He continues, “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, **that, after ye have done the will of God,** ye might receive the promise” (Heb. 10:35-36; emp. mine JR). We must never give up! One way to remember this important truth is to be encouraged along the way. As members of the Lord’s church, we should enjoy and embrace the various victories or accomplishments in this great battle for the soul (Rev. 16:16), because the war has already been won by the Lord (1 John 3:8; Heb. 2:14). We cannot lose **as long as** we do not give up (Rom. 11:22; Rev. 3:5). Allow the completion of good works (even the small victories) to encourage you as you labor in the Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:58).

LOOK FORWARD—WHEN A WORK IS FINISHED, IT IS TIME TO SEEK ANOTHER

While obviously, it is a good thing to reflect back and take encouragement in fulfillment of a ministry, it is also important to realize that our ultimate rest is in Heaven. In other words, there is no retirement plan in the church. The Lord’s work must always continue. Our vocation (true job) is that of God’s work (Eph. 4:1). Jesus put it this way, in Luke

13:24, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” To strive is to a-g-o-n-i-z-e and stretch oneself out in an exhausting manner on behalf of Christ and his work. To get the idea of striving, read about the wrestling match of Jacob in Genesis 32:24-32 or perhaps study about Paul buffeting his own body so as not to lose his crown (1 Cor. 9:24-27). Hebrews 4:11 declares, “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” Peter says, in 2 Peter 1:10, “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” In fact, two verses later, Peter adds, “Wherefore, I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth” (2 Pet. 1:12). In other words, even the famous and spiritual Peter knew that brethren needed reminding about never giving up! It is a tragedy among tragedies the way that some brethren, including even well-known preachers, give up. Why? Why would someone toil in the work of the church, perhaps suffer at the hands of worldly ridiculers or mean-spirited brethren, fight off temptation in his own life (not perfectly, but overwhelmingly), hold Satan at bay, overcome his shortcomings, never miss a Bible study or worship service, struggle through the difficulties of being a spouse and/or a parent, etc., and then give up?! Why? But this is exactly what thousands upon thousands have done within the body of Christ (Phi. 1:24; Col. 4:14 with 2 Tim. 4:10). Yet, this is exactly what we must not do. Instead of giving up, we should look for more work to do. In fact, remaining active in the work of God is one of the recipes of remaining saved (Mat. 12:45). As the old famous saying goes, “An idle mind is the Devil’s workshop.” There is no time for boredom when it comes to ministry. There is always work to be done

and there is never a time simply to give up (Mark 4:19). As Jesus said in John 15:2, “Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, **he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit**” (emp. mine JR). What did Jesus say? He said, concerning his branches, which are “in Him,” that they are to “bring forth more fruit.” In other words, his workers are to continue to seek other works or more work, so that additional fruit (converts) will be produced. In 2 Corinthians 2:14-15, Paul forever reminds us about the great work to be done in the church. He writes, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.” He goes on to pen, “To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor. 2:16). How does Paul say that God’s knowledge (truth) is made know? He said, “By us.” He not only said that, he also declared, “By us in every place.” If the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is God’s dynamite to save (Rom. 1:16-17), must go forth “by us,” then what happens when the church stops working? Plainly, God’s work ceases! In Colossians 1:10, Paul, after praying that brethren would grow in the knowledge of God’s Word writes, “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord **unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work**, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (emp. mine JR). Notice that “pleasing” the Lord is forevermore connected with “being fruitful in every good work.” In the church it is not “one and done,” but instead it is about working until our death and/or until the Lord’s Second Coming in Judgment (Rom. 14:12; Rev. 14:13). If you are not active in the Lord’s church, then start now. Action matters to God (John 15:1-6; Mat. 25:14-31).

LOOK UP—SALVATION IS SURELY WORTH ALL THE LABOR AND TOIL

There is a popular song that we often sing that includes the words, “We shall rest at the end of the day, when we’ve gone the last mile of the way.” Yes, rest is coming, but first there is work. Often times the work and trials seem overwhelming, but there is reality connected with our hope. The Christian hope is not a mere wishing, but desire, coupled with expectation (Rom. 8:24; Tit. 2:13). Romans 8:18 reads, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” While many of us can not even comprehend the deep sufferings and persecution undergone by our first century brethren, certainly every human understands the frailties and weaknesses of life, and the temporary nature of the human body. Surely, any reasonable person will understand that the fight (1 Tim. 6:12) and toil (1 Tim. 4:10 – “For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God” [ESV]) is worth it. Truly, our “labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). What did Paul say in Philippians 2:16? He declared, “Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.” In 1 Corinthians 15:19 Paul argues, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ [and in context he means “if” there is no resurrection of the dead—i.e., if Christ did not raise and if we do not raise], we are of all men most miserable.” Yet, in the next verse, Paul confidentially assets, “But now is Christ risen from the dead” (1 Cor. 15:20). Yes, Christ did rise from the dead (1 Cor. 15:1-4), and “in Him” we find our salvation (Rom. 6:1-18; Gal. 3:23-29). In John 12:32, it was the beloved John that recorded for Christ, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.” He was lifted up on Calvary’s Cross, and by that “once for

all” (Heb. 10:10) sacrifice, all men have the opportunity to be saved. Sadly, most will choose damnation (Mat. 7:13-14), but they do not have to and God does not want them to (Mat. 11:28-30; Rev. 3:20; Rev. 22:17). God wants all men to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9). Thus, God invites and pleads (through his preached Word, 1 Cor. 1:21), but He never forces salvation upon anyone. Salvation is a free-will choice. And those wise individuals who choose Christ over family (Mat. 10:34-37), over materialism (Mat. 6:24), over sensuality (Heb. 11:25; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-9), over false worship (John 4:24), over man-made religion (John 14:6; Mat. 16:18; Eph. 5:23), over selfishness and pride (Pro. 6:17; 1 John 2:16) and over every other fiery dart of the Devil will never regret it. Faithful members of the church of Christ should realize that their obedience is worth any and all heartache they will ever face (Phi. 3:20-21). First John 5:19 reminds us, “And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.” A few verses earlier the same inspired penman wrote, “They are of the world” (1 John 4:5), but “We are of God” (1 John 4:6). Should not the words of 1 John 2:25 encourage every faithful child of God? Therein, John says, “And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life.” Sometimes even the most faithful get downtrodden, depressed and/or in need of encouragement (cf., Elijah—1 Kin. 19:1-18; Paul—2 Cor. 12:9; Jesus—Luke 22:42-43, etc.).

It would do even the most faithful among us good simply to “look up” and remember that the war of the soul is not without purpose. As Paul once reminded Timothy, “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:4). Let there be no doubt, we are in a battle—a war—for our eternal souls (2 Tim. 4:7-8; Mat. 25:46; John 5:28-29). So, what is it that will keep you from making it to

Heaven? Surely, you will shout, “Nothing!” And gladly, this can (and should) certainly be the case (Rom. 8:31-39). As Jesus said in John 10:27-28, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and **they follow Me**: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” He continued, “My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:29). Does this mean that once a person is saved, that they can never be lost? Of course not (Luke 8:13; 1 Cor. 10:12; Heb. 3:12)! However, it does mean that **no other person** or situation can cause you to be lost. Being saved (or being lost) and staying saved is up to Y—O—U! As we just noted, the sheep of Jesus “hear [His] voice” and they “follow [Him].” As long as they continue to do this (i.e., live faithful and obedient lives), then “no man is able to pluck them out of [His] Father’s hand.” But certainly a straying sheep will be lost (Luke 15). Let us never stray. Let us never grow weak and weary. Let us never give up (Gal. 6:9). As the Hebrew’s writer encouraged those weary Saints of old, “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love...And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:10-12). Therefore, when false teachers and ungodly doctrine rear their ugly heads against the church (i.e., divided worship assemblies like children’s church; inclusion of solos, choirs and/or praise teams into worship; introduction of the mechanical instrument into worship; the removal and/or distortion of the Lord’s Supper (e.g., singing during the Communion) in worship; compromises concerning the clear teaching of marriage, divorce, and remarriage found within Matthew 19:9; denial of the essentiality of baptism for the remission of

sins as undeniably taught in Acts 2:38; etc.), it is imperative that faithful soldiers stand strong for Christ and His beloved Bride. Souls are always worth it (Mat. 16:26; 1 Tim. 1:18-20). Realizing such things, we should remember the words of Acts 20:32, wherein Paul gave the solution against grievous wolves (false teachers). He said, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” The weapon to defeat our enemy is still God’s powerful, inerrant, verbally inspired and all-sufficient Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Eph. 6:17). May we never forget that there is no speech, scholarly paper, helpful journal, funny joke, or powerful illustration that can take the place of God’s Holy Writ! No, it is God’s Word alone that involves the power to teach of salvation (Acts 4:12; John 8:31-32; John 17:17).

CONCLUSION

As we described above, the phrase in Acts 12:25, “When they had fulfilled their ministry,” reminds us to: (1) **Look Around**—Numerous ministries/opportunities abound; (2) **Look Back**—Great encouragement exists when a work is complete; (3) **Look Forward**—When a work is finished, it is time to seek another; and (4) **Look Up**—Salvation is surely worth all the labor and toil.

It is truly amazing the endless lessons found within God’s Word. The very fact that powerful truths can be gleaned and helpful memories ignited by the study of a simple phrase within one book of the Bible should greatly encourage us to study more of the Bible. In other words, if one phrase can produce pages and pages of commentary and thoughts, how much more so, if other inspired words, phrases, sentences, verses, chapters and books of the Bible are studied? Let us remember the words of the Psalmist wherein he said of the

godly man, that “his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night” (Psa. 1:2). Yet, his meditation, study, and planning turn into work. Psalm 1:3 records, “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that **bringeth forth his fruit in his season**; his leaf also shall not wither; and **whatsoever he doeth shall prosper**” (emp. mine JR). May we complete our ministries!

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CHAPTER 27

The Exhortation Of Barnabas: With Purpose Of Heart Cleave Unto The Lord

Jason Hilburn

In the first century A.D., there was a man named Joses, upon whom the apostles of Christ had bestowed the honorable surname “Barnabas,” meaning “son of consolation” or “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36; KJV). He was described by the Holy Spirit Himself as “a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith” (Acts 11:24; cf. Acts 13:2). After hearing that there were many new converts in Antioch, the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas, “who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23; cf. Acts 11:19-22; Acts 13:43).

To “exhort” means to “admonish,” “entreat,” “beseech,” or “encourage” (Thayer, “Parakaleō”). To “cleave” unto the Lord means “to remain with,” “to continue with,” or “to hold fast to” the Lord (Thayer, “Prosmenō”). Robertson described this as “to keep on remaining loyal to” the Lord. Those Christians at Antioch needed to be encouraged to persevere. Such an exhortation is just as needful today as it was for those of Barnabas’ day—not only for new converts, but even

for veteran soldiers of the faith, because only those who are “faithful unto death” will receive a “crown of life” (Rev. 2:10; cf. Acts 13:43; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

If children of God know they have not been doing what they need to do, it creates a barrier between them and God (cf. Isa. 59:1-2; Luke 12:47; Rom. 14:23; Jam. 4:17). They may find themselves not wanting to think about or discuss spiritual matters, because it reminds them that they have not been doing what they should. The neglect of doing these positive spiritual things may then cause them to focus their time on distractions such as entertainment or other worldly pleasures to get their minds off of what is really bothering them. If children of God would instead get busy doing the things that God would have them do, not only would they would feel better, but they would also be close to God again.

Realizing the great need to cleave to the Lord, Christians must understand how to accomplish this. Four ways will be noticed in which Christians can cleave unto the Lord: character, communication, communion, and comfort.

Cleave In The Character Of Christ

Christians are those who believe, leave, and cleave. They believe in Christ, they leave sin behind, and cleave to the Lord by walking in His faithful footsteps of obedience (John 8:24; John 8:29; Acts 2:38-42; 1 Pet. 2:21-24; 1 John 1:7). Through their initial obedience to the Gospel, they enter into Christ for the first time, and from that point they should continually grow (Mat. 5:6; Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 1:5-8; 2 Pet. 3:18). Christians who love their Lord should not be satisfied or complacent regarding their spirituality. They should always desire to be closer to their Lord.

When it comes to earthly relationships, the more individuals have in common, the closer they generally are.

This could also be said of a Christian's relationship with His Savior. The more a Christian has "the mind of Christ" (Phi. 2:5), the more he will have in common with His Savior, and the closer he will be to Him. To cleave in the character of Christ is to see like the Savior, sacrifice like the Savior, and serve like the Savior.

See Like The Savior

Christians must learn to think like the Lord. One must "see things" the way the Savior does. When Jesus saw people, He saw souls that needed to be saved (Luke 19:10; cf. Luke 5:31-32). He saw many people "choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life" who needed to change their priorities and put God first in their lives (Luke 8:14; Mat. 6:33; Mat. 16:26; Mat. 22:36-38; Luke 18:22-30). Christ also saw suffering people through eyes of compassion (Mat. 9:36). He genuinely cared about people, even His enemies (Luke 23:34; cf. Mat. 5:43-48; Rom. 5:8; Rom. 12:17-21). Because Christ cared about people, He hated anything that threatened their eternal salvation, including false teaching (Rev. 2:15; cf. Heb. 1:9). Christians must see people the way Christ did, and they must see sin the way Christ did: "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Rom. 12:9; cf. Psa. 119:104; Psa. 119:128; Mat. 7:15-20; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Rev. 2:2).

Christ saw this world as merely a temporary place to dwell until He entered Paradise and Heaven (Luke 23:43; John 16:5). Followers of Christ should see this world the same way Christ did, refusing to fall in love with this present world and the temporal things therein (cf. Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:18; Tit. 2:11-12; Heb. 11:13-16; Jam. 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). When Christians see things like Christ, they naturally become closer to Him and more easily cleave to Him.

Sacrifice Like The Savior

Because of His love for God and man, Christ was willing to leave the wonders of Heaven (2 Cor. 8:9), be born into a poor family (Luke 2:7; Luke 2:24; cf. Lev. 5:7), have nowhere to lay His head (Mat. 8:20), and be ridiculed, tortured, and killed (Mat. 26:67ff; John 8:48-49). Because He was glorious God in Heaven before He willingly came to earth (John 1:1-3; John 17:5; Phi. 2:6-9), and because He never did anything sinful to deserve death (John 8:29; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22), He sacrificed more than any other person ever could! The sacrificial Savior commands men to look to His example of sacrifice and follow it, even to the point of death if necessary:

The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day. And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. (Luke 9:22-24; cf. Mat. 16:21-26; Gal. 5:24; Rev. 2:10)

As a faithful follower of Christ, Barnabas saw worldly things as Christ did; therefore, he did not become attached to such things. He was willing to make sacrifices:

Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:34-37)

Barnabas also saw the value in human souls and was willing to sacrifice much in dangerous missionary journeys, spreading the Word of God at the risk of his own personal safety (Mat. 16:26; Acts 13:45-46; Acts 14:19-22). These sacrifices of Barnabas brought him closer to the Lord and made him more effective in exhorting other people to cleave to the Lord (Acts 11:23; Acts 13:43).

What are Christians willing to sacrifice today? Are Christians today willing to sacrifice their time for the Lord? Are Christians willing to part with money and possessions for the cause of Christ like Barnabas did? (Acts 4:36-37; cf. Acts 2:45; 2 Cor. 8:3-5; 2 Cor. 9:7). Are Christians willing to leave sinful habits or relationships that jeopardize their souls? (cf. Rom. 6; Mat. 6:33; Mark 6:18; 1 Cor. 15:33). Do Christians realize that making sacrifices and suffering for the cause of Christ will actually bring great joy? (Mat. 5:10-12; Acts 5:40-41; 1 Pet. 3:14). Knowing that one has sacrificed much for the cause of Christ will help bring him closer to Christ, as he eagerly and confidently anticipates the reward given at His return (2 Tim. 4:6-8; 1 John 4:17-18).

Serve Like The Savior

To have the character of Christ is to have the mind of a servant, and to serve like Christ requires humility: "Let

nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phi. 2:3-5; cf. Mat. 11:29). Pride will keep one from being a humble servant, and it will also keep one from being close to God: “Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off” (Psa. 138:6; cf. Pro. 6:16-17). “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished” (Pro. 16:5).

If anyone had reasons to be proud, it was the Son of God, yet He took upon Him the form of a servant (2 Cor. 8:9; Phi. 2:5-9). The Son of God was not above servitude, even if it meant washing men’s feet! May men never forget the main reason why Jesus washed His disciples’ feet—to teach them to be humble servants:

So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. (John 13:12-17)

The very reason Christ came to earth was to minister to others, even to the point of dying for them: “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mat. 20:28; cf. Mat. 11:29; John 10:17-18). Jesus also taught that the greatest people are actually lowly servants: “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Mat. 23:11-12). Christians can humbly serve like the Savior by helping others with physical needs or, more importantly, with spiritual needs (Gal. 5:13-14; Gal. 6:1-2; Gal. 6:9-10; Jam. 2:15-16; 1 John 3:16-17).

Christians must also remember that the way they treat others is the way they treat Christ: “And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Mat. 25:40; cf. Acts 9:4). When Christians do good to others, it is as if they are doing it to the Lord Himself: “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again” (Pro. 19:17).

However, if Christians are not helping and serving others, they cannot be close to the Lord: “Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Mat. 25:45-46). If Christians will see, sacrifice, and serve like the Savior, they will inevitably be closer to the Lord.

Cleave In Communication With The Father

Certainly cleaving to the Lord includes having a close relationship with the One Whom children of God call

“Father.” Although the term *Lord* in the New Testament Scriptures most often refers to Jesus, it can also refer to God the Father, as in the prayer recorded in Acts 4:24-30. God the Father wants His children to remain close to Him, and He has given His children the privilege of approaching His throne by the authority of Jesus, the Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 7:25; Heb. 9:15).

Jesus left an example of a Son who took the time to pray often to His Father (Mat. 26:39-44; Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; Luke 9:28; Luke 22:32; John 17). The Son of God also taught His followers that they should be people of prayer (Mat. 6:6-34; Mat. 7:7-12; Luke 11:1-13; Luke 18:1; John 14:13; John 15:16; John 16:23-27). After Jesus went back to Heaven, inspired men continued to encourage God’s children to pray constantly to their Father (Rom. 12:12; Rom. 15:30; Eph. 5:20; Eph. 6:18; Phi. 1:3-4; Phi. 4:6; Col. 4:2; Col. 4:12; 1 The. 5:17; 2 The. 1:11, etc.). A typical prayer may involve praising God, thanking Him, making requests, and acknowledging dependence upon Him (Mat. 6:9-13; cf. John 17; Eph. 5:20; Phi. 4:6; Col. 3:17; Jam. 1:17).

There is one particular aspect of prayer which needs to be emphasized in cleaving to the Lord—the child of God’s prayer for forgiveness. The sad truth is that even children of God will sin from time to time (1 John 1:8-10). The sincere, penitent prayer for forgiveness keeps Christians close to God, removing those sins which threaten to separate Christians from their God forever (Acts 8:22-24; Jam. 5:16; 1 John 1:9). Without this “second avenue of pardon,” Christians would not be able to cleave to God if they sinned after baptism. When one prays a sincere, heartfelt prayer to His Father, he casts his burdens upon the One who can carry them all (1 Pet. 5:7); he knows the blood of Christ is washing away his sins as he confesses them in penitence (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:7-

9; 1 John 2:1-2); and he has a peace that those in the world cannot understand:

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Phi. 4:6-7)

Children of God who do not pray often to their Father are depriving themselves of spiritual blessings that God wants them to have (Mat. 21:22; John 16:24; Jam. 4:2; 1 John 3:21-22; 1 John 5:14-15), and they are, perhaps unknowingly, building a barrier between themselves and God. How long does it take to offer a prayer similar to the “model prayer” to the Father? (Mat. 6:9-13). Although the model prayer is not the model for Christians today in every way (cf. John 16:24; 1 Tim. 2:1-6), it was apparently meant to be a general guideline that could be followed (Luke 11:1-4; cf. Ecc. 5:2). However, it is what most would consider a very brief prayer. As a matter of fact, one can read the words of Matthew 6:9-13 at a normal rate in less than twenty seconds! Although more time devoted to God than this would be preferable (cf. Psa. 55:17; Dan. 6:10; Acts 6:4), surely no child of God can rightfully say that he does not have twenty seconds for God! If one cannot even spare twenty seconds for God at various points throughout the day, is he really cleaving to the Lord? Children of God must make room for God in their lives, or He will not make room for them in Heaven (Mat. 7:21-23; Rev. 2:10).

Cleave In Communion With Christians

Since the days immediately following Jesus' resurrection on the first day of the week, followers of Christ have assembled on the first day of the week (John 20:1; John 20:19; John 20:26). After the Lord's church was established on the first day of the week (Acts 2:1-41), the Bible records disciples coming together often, on the first day of every week, to "break the bread" of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16; 1 Cor. 11:20-34; cf. 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). Paul referred to this as the "communion" of the blood and body of Christ: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16).

The word *communion* is translated from the Greek word *koinonia*, which can have the meaning of "fellowship" (Thayer). If one looks at the English word *communion*, one can easily picture the words "common union." It can be rightly said that the sacrifice of Christ is the "common union" between Christians. It is His sacrifice on the cross that has the power to bring all men together in Him: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32; cf. Eph. 2:16). It was also His sacrifice that united men with God: "We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10; cf. 2 Cor. 5:18; Col. 1:21-22). God wants Christians to observe communion when the "whole church" has "come...together into one place" (1 Cor. 11:17-18; 1 Cor. 11:20; 1 Cor. 11:33; cf. 1 Cor. 14:23). This act of worship helps to bring those of "like precious faith" together as they cleave to the Lord in memory of what He did for them (2 Pet. 1:1; 1 Cor. 11:24-26).

Although the primary reason for assembling is to worship God, another purpose of the worship assembly is

for Christians to encourage one another to be faithful. The early church had faithful saints like Barnabas who would exhort other Christians to persevere and be faithful. According to the writer of Hebrews, assembling together helps Christians “hold fast” to the faith and continue in “love” and “good works” because Christians provoke one another to do these things:

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Heb. 10:23-25; cf. Pro. 27:17)

Some other acts of worship besides communion, such as singing, have a secondary purpose of admonishing Christians to cleave to the Lord: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). When the Word of God is presented to the assembled saints, it is for “edification, and exhortation, and comfort” (1 Cor. 14:3; cf. 1 Cor. 14:12; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 4:12; Eph. 4:16; Eph. 4:29; 1 The. 5:11; 1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 4:2). In other words, when Christians assemble they build one another up, they prompt one another to do what is right, and they comfort one another.

The assembly of the local church is a tremendous blessing which should not be taken for granted. If a Christian

will cleave to the Lord, he must not neglect this great duty and blessing. If he does sever himself from this blessed communion of the saints, he has also severed himself from his Lord instead of cleaving to Him (Heb. 10:26-31).

Cleave In The Comfort Of The Holy Spirit

Although God's children speak to Him in prayer (Mat. 6:6-9), God speaks to men today through His Spirit-inspired Scriptures (1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Rev. 2:7; Rev. 2:11; Rev. 2:17; Rev. 2:29; Rev. 3:6; Rev. 3:13; Rev. 3:22). To be close to God, men must be receptive to what the Spirit is saying through the Bible. Only those who have "ears to hear" will have the potential of being blessed by God:

For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them. (Mat. 13:15-17; cf. Rev. 2:7; Rev. 2:11; Rev. 13:9, etc.)

God has always desired for men to give ear to His Words so they will learn how to be close to Him:

Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David... Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon... So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. (Isa. 55:3; Isa. 55:6-7; Isa. 55:11-12)

It is through obedience to God's Word that men are initially reconciled to God (Rom. 1:16; 2 Cor. 5:19; Heb. 5:9; Jam. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:22), and it is through adhering to His Word that they remain in a right relationship with Him (Mat. 7:21-23; John 8:31-32; Jam. 1:19-25). Only through God's Word can one learn of Christ, have faith in Christ, obey Christ, and have the mind of Christ (John 6:44-45; Rom. 10:17; Heb. 5:9; Phi. 2:5). When a person removes the sin from his life, he must then fill that void with godly things of the Spirit (John 6:63; Gal. 5:22-25; Phi. 4:8; 2 Pet. 1:5-8; 2 Pet. 3:18). He must not only believe sound doctrine at the point of conversion, but he must "continue" in sound doctrine:

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine...Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. (1 Tim. 4:13-16; cf. 2 Tim. 2:15; Tit. 2:1)

Therefore, the necessity of regular Bible study cannot be emphasized enough for the Christian who desires to cleave to the Lord.

Bible study can be accomplished in a group setting (such as Bible classes with a local congregation of the Lord's church) or in a private setting. The faithful Christian should take every advantage of both settings; however, many times it is private personal Bible study that is neglected. Personal Bible study requires the Christian to have self-discipline (2 Tim. 2:15). In most cases, there will be no one standing over the Christian to make sure he is reading his Bible on a regular basis. Therefore, when Christians have spare time and are faced with the choice of entertainment or Bible study, many will unwisely allocate all of their spare time to entertainment. The devil and his disciples work diligently, tempting Christians to do what is deemed by some as "more fun," rather than investing in the eternal joy available through God's Word: "I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil" (Psa. 119:162; cf. Phi. 2:16).

The devil has also done an excellent job in convincing men that the Bible is too large and intimidating. Is the Bible really an insurmountable obstacle which cannot be conquered? Do Christians today have enough time to devote

to reading such a “large” book? If one were to compare time spent engaged in popular forms of entertainment versus the time it takes to read the Bible, what would he find?

There are many who spend countless hours reading secular books. What if the child of God spent as much time reading the Bible as he spent reading other books? Although this book series is not being recommended, the Harry Potter series of books has sold over “450 million copies, making it the best-selling book series in history, and has been translated into 67 languages. The last four books consecutively set records as the fastest-selling books in history” (“Harry Potter”). The Harry Potter book series has a total of 4,100 pages (“How Many Pages?”). How does this compare to the Bible? The Bibles in the pews where this writer worships contain only 960 pages of Biblical text, with only 223 pages in the New Testament. Therefore, in the time spent reading the Harry Potter series, one could have read the entire Bible at least four times, or the entire New Testament eighteen times! It is understood that page and font sizes could slightly affect these numbers, but the point is clear, nonetheless, and this was a conservative estimate. What if over 450 million people alive today could honestly say they had read the entire Bible four times, or the New Testament eighteen times? The size of the Bible is not as intimidating as the devil would like men to believe, and he has deceived many into cleaving to forms of entertainment such as the Harry Potter franchise more than they cleave to the Lord.

What about the time one may spend in other forms of entertainment, such as watching sports? Instead of watching sports most of the day on a Saturday, how many chapters of the Bible could have been read during the duration of just one football game? The average college football game lasts “about 3 hours” (“What is the Duration?”), and the average

adult reads between 200 and 300 words per minute (wpm). People who enjoy reading typically read above 400 wpm. Many people read at speeds above 800 wpm and maintain excellent comprehension (“Free Reading Test”). During the time it would have taken to watch one football game, at an average rate of 250 words per minute, the sports fan could have read Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First Thessalonians, Second Thessalonians, First Timothy, Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, First Peter, Second Peter, First John, Second John, Third John, and Jude, and still have over 35 minutes remaining! (Based on total number of words per book; Kizziah). That would be 76 chapters of God’s Word, and he would still have time to include First Corinthians, for a total of 92 chapters in three hours! Granted, one may want to spend more time in each book in deeper study, but the point is clear—people have time to read God’s Word.

Many more examples and statistics could be given, such as time spent playing video games or browsing the Internet. The average American spends thirteen hours per week playing video games (Makuch), and the average Internet user spends about thirteen hours per week online, excluding email usage (Whitney). Thirteen hours per week is an average of 111 minutes per day, in which a person could read a book lengthier than the book of Acts (only 97 minutes at 250 words per minute). Again, the Bible is not as large and intimidating as men have been persuaded to believe, and Christians must fill their minds with God’s Word to think like Him and be close to Him (Psa. 119:97; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18; 1 Tim. 4:13; 1 Tim. 4:15-16; 2 Tim. 2:15; Col. 3:2; Phi. 4:8).

If all of the above exhortations from the Word of God are heeded, one can be confident that he is doing the will of God. Such will bring a peace and comfort to the individual,

knowing that he is at peace with God (Acts 8:39; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; 1 John 2:3). The faithful Christian cleaving to the Lord in those things mentioned above is walking “after the Spirit” and has “no condemnation” (Rom. 8:1). He understands that his obedience to “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” has made him “free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2; cf. Rom. 6:17-18). He does not “mind the things of the flesh,” but “the things of the Spirit” because “to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:5-6). Christians who are following God’s Word are “led by the Spirit of God,” and they have the comfort of knowing “they are the sons of God... And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:14; Rom. 8:17; cf. Rom. 8:16; 1 John 2:3). The Spirit says that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18; cf. 1 The. 4:18), and at the end of Romans chapter eight are some of the most comforting words the Spirit ever revealed:

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is

written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:31-39)

Conclusion

Through character, communication, communion, and comfort, Christians can cleave unto the Lord. Doing these things will help Christians have a clear conscience toward God which is essential to be at peace with God and remain in His grace. However, all men, not just Christians, should be taught the necessity of cleaving to the Lord by having their sins washed away and purposing in their hearts to continue in the grace of God (Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 11:23; Acts 13:43). May all Christians be like Barnabas, not only in cleaving to the Lord, but also in encouraging others to do so.

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CHAPTER 28

Carried Away With The Dissimulation: When The Great Encourager Became Discouraged

Chance Hicks

Joses was an individual who stood out among the people of God in the first century because of his emphasis on encouragement. He was so given to encouraging others that the apostles nicknamed him Barnabas, the Son of Consolation (Acts 4:36; KJV). He was such an encourager it was as if encouragement had been his father! Barnabas encouraged individuals by walking with them. Nearly every time he is mentioned in the New Testament he is mentioned alongside someone else because his life was focused on encouraging individuals. Barnabas encouraged individuals by talking with them. He spoke to the congregation of Christians at Antioch “and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23). Barnabas truly was a great encourager. He was a man full of faith (Acts 11:24) who used his time, his talents, and his tongue to influence individuals for good. He worked to put into the hearts of others courage, confidence, and hope.

There was a time when the great encourager Barnabas became discouraged. It was a time when the Son of

Consolation needed consoling and needed encouragement. Even the greatest of God's people throughout the centuries of time experienced difficult times when they needed encouragement. Those individuals that we hold up and champion as great men of faith, who were able to do great things for the Lord, experienced times when they were down, distracted, and discouraged in need of encouragement. Moses needed encouragement to stand before Pharaoh, and God sent Aaron with him to be his mouthpiece and his encourager (Exo. 3-4). Joshua, who led the Israelites into the land of Canaan conquering Jericho, needed encouragement along the way (Deut. 1:37-38; Deut. 3:28; Deut. 31:7-8). Barak needed encouragement before he was willing to go forward into battle, and Deborah went with him to encourage him (Jud. 4:8-9). The great prophet Elijah found himself in need of encouragement shortly after his great victory over the prophets of Baal. Elijah was hiding in a cave, fearful that his life was about to be taken by the wicked queen Jezebel (1 Kin. 19:1-18). He was convinced that he was the only faithful follower of God left in Israel. God spoke to Elijah in the cave with an encouraging fact, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (1 Kin. 19:18). Elijah also found Elisha, an encouraging friend, when he left the cave (1 Kin. 19:19). The truth of the matter is that all of God's people need encouragement from time to time. Even the great encourager Barnabas experienced difficult times in life when he needed encouragement. Even the great encourager stumbled and needed someone to help lift him up. There is an occasion recorded in Scripture where Barnabas the great encourager became discouraged. We will consider three things as we consider our topic together: the passage (Gal. 2:11-16), the problem that often discourages

people today, and the practical—lessons we can learn from this event in the life of Barnabas.

The Passage

Paul records this event, when the great encourager became discouraged, in his epistle to the churches of Galatia.

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Gal. 2:11-16)

The Ways Of Peter

The passage describes the general and usual ways of Peter the apostle. It was his usual practice to eat with the Gentiles, “For before certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles” (Gal. 2:12). Peter had previously learned that there was no difference between Jew and Gentile within the family of God (cf. Gal. 3:26-28). Acts 10 records the vision which the Lord revealed to Peter concerning the Gentiles (Acts 10:11-16). Three times Peter saw a great sheet let down from heaven filled with all manner of beasts, creeping things, and fowls. Peter was commanded to kill and eat, but he refused those things because they were common and unclean. The same voice that commanded him to eat responded, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15). Peter came to realize what this vision meant after Cornelius called for him, “And he said unto them, Ye know that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). Peter preached and proclaimed that the message of God was for Jew and Gentile alike, “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34-35). When the matter of circumcision was disputed and discussed in Jerusalem concerning whether or not Gentiles should be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, it was Peter who came to their defense,

Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and

believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. (Acts 15:7-11)

Peter originally ate with the Gentiles, cooperated with the Gentiles, and fellowshiped the Gentiles because he believed there was no difference between Jew and Gentile. He believed that they were both one in Christ Jesus. “The imperfect tense of the Greek verb indicates that Peter’s eating **with the Gentiles** was continuous, that is, habitual and regular over some period of time. He ate whatever was set before him with whoever was sitting beside him” (MacArthur, *Galatians* 50).

The passage also describes the way of Peter when certain individuals came from James. When these Jews came from James, Peter began to change the way he interacted with the Gentiles. Peter did not change what he believed concerning Jews and Gentiles, but he changed his practice regarding his belief. When these came from James, Paul records that Peter first withdrew himself. The term *withdrew* means to draw back and can refer to “those who from timidity hesitate to avow what they believe” (Thayer’s). *Hupostello* is “a term used for strategic military disengagement. Polibius used it to describe troops drawing back from the enemy in order to

secure shelter and safety. The imperfect tense may indicate that Peter's withdrawal was gradual and, if so, suggests the idea of sneaky retreat" (MacArthur, *Galatians* 51). When these came from James, Peter slowly began retreating from the Gentiles. He began to sever his ties of fellowship with them. This gradual withdrawal ended with a complete separation from the Gentile believers, "and separated himself" (Gal. 2:12). *Separated* means "to set off by boundary, that is, (figuratively) limit, exclude, appoint, etc: divide, separate, sever" (Strong, "Aphorizo"). Peter slowly withdrew from the Gentiles and finally severed his fellowship and relationship with them. He originally ate with the Gentiles, but when these came from James, he would no longer even sit with them at the same table.

The reason Peter changed his practice is recorded, "fearing them which were of the circumcision" (Gal. 2:12). Peter's fear of these individuals who came from James caused him to change his relationship with the Gentiles completely. Peter's fear of suffering and persecution stood in the way of him acting in accordance with his beliefs and convictions. This is not the first time that Peter's fear prevented him from acting in accordance with his beliefs. Peter believed that Jesus was the Son of God (cf. Mat. 16:16), but when confronted during the trial of Jesus, Peter's fear kept him from acknowledging that he was one of His disciples. Here Peter has opportunity to demonstrate to these from James true New Testament Christianity but because of his fear of them and what they might do to him he cowered away from the proper practice of Christianity.

The Waves Of Peter

The actions of Peter had a negative impact and influence on others around him who looked up to him as a leader in the church. His actions caused waves within the body of

Christ. As a result of Peter withdrawing and separating from the Gentiles, “the other Jews dissembled likewise with him” (Gal. 2:13). The actions of Peter sent ripples through the body of Christ. The other Jews who used to eat with and associate with the Gentile believers followed the example of Peter and separated themselves from the Gentiles, too. The phrase *dissembled likewise* means “to act hypocritically in concert with” (Strong, “Sunupokrinomai”). Peter’s fellow Jews played the hypocrite right along with him as they acted contrary to their beliefs and convictions because they followed Peter who feared those from James.

At this time, Barnabas was a prominent figure in the church at Antioch (Acts 11:22-23). He and Saul had assembled with the congregation in Antioch for a whole year before they were sent by that congregation with relief for the brethren in Judea (Acts 11:26-30). After returning from Jerusalem, Barnabas was sent with Saul on the first missionary journey from the church at Antioch where he had been a teacher (Acts 13:1-3). The first missionary journey of Saul and Barnabas ended with them rehearsing to the church at Antioch “all that God had done with them” (Acts 14:27). Acts 14 closes with this statement, “And there they abode long time with the disciples” (Acts 14:28). Barnabas was well known within the church at Antioch, but even this great man of God was “carried away with their dissimulation” (Gal. 2:13). The great encourager was discouraged from doing what was right because of the example he had seen in Peter and the other Jews. Since Barnabas was such a prominent figure within the church at Antioch, his hypocrisy would have had a tremendous influence on the congregation there just as Peter’s did (Wiersbe 694). The actions of Peter had far-reaching effects within the church at Antioch and resulted in a divided congregation.

The Words Of Paul

Paul withstood Peter to the face because he was to be blamed for the resulting division within the congregation (Gal. 2:11) and because he was not walking uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel (Gal. 2:14). The term *withstood* “carries the meaning of hindering or forbidding, and was usually applied to defensive measures” (MacArthur 49). When Peter came to Antioch, Paul stood face to face with Peter and opposed him because his actions had caused division within the church. He was to blame for the waves of division that had roared through the church. Not only did Paul withstand him to the face, but he did it in the presence of all (Gal. 2:14). The actions of Peter were public actions, and the rebuke of Paul was public rebuke in the presence of them all. Paul looked at the actions of Peter and compared them with the teachings of Scripture. What he found was that Peter and those who followed his example were no longer walking according to the truth of the Gospel (cf. Phi. 1:27). Instead of demonstrating the doctrine of God in their lives, they were portraying a perverted picture of the Gospel. Paul withstood Peter to correct the hypocrisy that he and the others were displaying in the church.

His goal was to correct Peter that he might be sound in both the proclamation and practice of the truth (cf. Tit. 1:13). In rebuking Peter, the source of the division, before them all, Paul was encouraging the others who had followed him to get back in line as well. He was encouraging them to go back to walking uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel. Paul wanted the Jews to return to their fellowship with the Gentiles and for division to cease in the congregation at Antioch. He withstood Peter to the face to correct Peter and to encourage those who followed him to correct their actions as well.

The Problem

Peter's hypocrisy had influenced the other Jews including even Barnabas to act contrary to their beliefs and convictions. The term *dissimulation* in the King James Version is translated *hypocrisy* in the English Standard Version. The original word means "acting under a feigned part" (Strong, "Hupokrisis"). "The Greek term behind hypocrisy originally referred to an actor wearing a mask to indicate a particular mood or type of character" (MacArthur, *Galatians* 52). There are two types of hypocrisy mentioned in the New Testament. There is the hypocrisy demonstrated by the Pharisees in which they pretended to be righteous, pure, and holy when in reality they were full of corruption and ungodliness (cf. Matt. 23:27-28). Then there is the type of hypocrisy demonstrated by Peter and his fellow Jews in which they acted contrary to what they knew to be right. Peter knew it was right to fellowship the Gentiles, but when those came from James he acted hypocritically.

Both types of hypocrisy are found within the Lord's church. There are those who are hypocritical like the Pharisees. On the outside they look as if they are truehearted Christians, but within, their minds and lives are filled with filth and immorality. Around those who are Christians, they are masking their real selves and pretending to be righteous when they are not. There are those who are hypocritical like Peter and the Jews who know and believe what is right but who put into practice something different. They believe what others to be doing is wrong, but instead of standing against it, they go along with the flow.

Its Cause

What is the cause of hypocrisy? Why do individuals pretend to be something that they are not? Why do individuals refuse to practice what they believe and know to be right?

The root cause of hypocrisy is fear. Fear motivated Peter to act hypocritically, “For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision” (Gal. 2:12). Peter withdrew from the Gentiles because he was afraid of how the Jews from James would treat him. Maybe he was afraid of them rejecting him or of them persecuting him for his acceptance of the Gentiles. “The most the Judaizers could have done against Peter was to ridicule him and malign him in Jerusalem, as their fellow Judaizers would later malign Paul in Galatia.” Peter was afraid of “losing popularity and prestige” with this group of men who came from James (MacArthur, *Galatians* 51). The fear of men motivated Peter to act hypocritically.

The fear of men caused certain among the chief rulers to act hypocritically, “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42-43). Here were individuals who were convinced that Jesus was the Christ, yet they acted hypocritically—contrary to their beliefs—because they feared men more than God. They were afraid that if they confessed their belief, they would be rejected and removed from the synagogue.

Fear is still what motivates individuals to play the hypocrite. Christians who are afraid of rejection, suffering, and persecution allow that fear to conquer them and to control their lives. Instead of taking a stand for what is right and demonstrating their true beliefs, they give in to the fear of men and act hypocritically. Those who pretend to be righteous when in reality they are not fear rejection. They fear what people would say and how they would be treated if reality were known. Those who refuse to stand for what they

know is right fear the suffering and persecution that might come from their actions.

Its Corruption

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the corrupting nature of sin, “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6). Hypocrisy is a sin that will cause corruption in the body of Christ. The hypocrisy of Peter spread through the church in Antioch like wildfire. It began with Peter withdrawing from the Gentiles, but it ended with all the Jews, even including Barnabas, withdrawing from the Gentiles. Hypocrisy in the church today continues to cause corruption. When hypocrisy is found in the body of Christ, it must be dealt with and corrected, or it will grow and spread throughout the congregation. We must wake up and recall the warning of Paul to the Corinthians, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor. 15:33).

Its Contrast

What God desires in His children is the opposite of hypocrisy. He does not want us to be pretenders at Christianity; He wants us to be true, real practitioners of Christianity. This was Paul’s prayer for the church in Philippi, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ” (Phi. 1:9-10). The term *sincere* carries “the idea of testing something by sunlight” (MacArthur, *Philippians* 50). *Sincere* refers to that which is “tested as genuine” (Strong, “Eilikrines”). MacArthur goes on to explain the word:

In ancient Rome fine pottery was relatively thin and fragile and often developed cracks while being fired.

Unscrupulous shops would fill the cracks with a hard, dark wax, which would be concealed when the object was painted or glazed but would melt when the pottery was filled with something hot. In ordinary light, the deception was usually undetectable, but when held up to the sunlight it was clearly exposed, because the wax appeared darker. Reputable dealers would often stamp their products *sine cera* (“without wax”) as a guarantee of high quality. Just as such pottery was held up to the sunlight to reveal cracks or other defects, the obedient, faithful believer makes sure to expose his life to the sunlight of Scripture. (50)

Instead of wearing a mask, God wants us to be the real thing! The contrast of hypocrisy is a life that can be tested by the Scripture and found to be without wax. Our desire should be sincerity—a life that is in total keeping with the Scriptures. Our goal should be to have faith and love that is unfeigned (cf. 1 Tim. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:22).

Its Cure

What will help us to overcome hypocrisy? What will help us to be “sincere and without offense till the day of Christ” (Phi. 1:10)? The answer is fear. The fear of men is what causes an individual to act hypocritically. Men act hypocritically because they love the praise of men more than the praise of God. Men act hypocritically because they fear men more than they fear God. We can overcome the problem of hypocrisy by developing a greater fear of God than fear of man. Jesus warned His disciples to fear God more than they feared man,

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mat. 10:28). Luke recorded similar words from the Christ, “But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him” (Luke 12:5). Peter must have learned that fearing men leads to hypocrisy, but fearing God leads to sincerity. Later in life he wrote, “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Pet. 2:17). His first epistle was encouragement to scattered Christians to be faithful in spite of suffering that might result. He concluded the fourth chapter with this, “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Pet. 4:19). Peter wanted his brethren to fear God and obey Him instead of fearing men and what men might do to them. If we will overcome hypocrisy, we must learn the lesson Peter learned that being accepted with God is much more important than being accepted with man. Let us learn to fear God and desire the praise of God more than we fear man and desire man’s praise (Ecc. 12:13).

The Practical

This occasion in the life of Peter, Barnabas, and Paul teaches us some great practical lessons that can help us in our daily manner of living. There are at least three practical lessons that can be gleaned from these three men in this passage of Scripture.

The Lesson Of Connections

From Peter, we learn the lesson of connections. We must learn and never forget that our lives are connected to those around us. Paul wrote to the Romans, “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself” (Rom. 14:7).

It is impossible to go through life without being connected to someone else. It is impossible to go through life without influencing someone else. Peter's poor choice to withdraw from the Gentiles did not just affect him (Gal. 2:13). His connection with the other Jews influenced them to follow his example. We, too, are connected to numerous individuals as we go through our daily lives. We will influence our families, our friends, our schoolmates, our employers, our employees, our acquaintances, and even strangers. We must always consider how our decisions and actions will affect those who are connected to us. We have the possibility of influencing them negatively or influencing them positively. It should always be our desire to be a positive influence for good in the lives of those to which we are connected (cf. Mat. 5:16). We should strive to live the words of Paul to the Corinthians, "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32).

Since we are connected to other people in life not only do we influence them, but they also have an influence upon us. We might need to take time to investigate our friendships to make sure those relationships are healthy to our spiritual wellbeing. It may be that we have some friendships that need dissolving because they constantly influence us toward evil and wickedness (cf. 1 Cor. 15:33). Let us surround ourselves with great encouragers like Barnabas who will keep us pointed in the right direction!

The Lesson Of Consequences

From the great encourager Barnabas, we learn the lesson of consequences. Barnabas reaped what he had sown. Paul wrote at the end of this epistle about the principle of sowing and reaping, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption;

but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:7-8). Barnabas had spent his time wisely as an encourager of the brethren (cf. Acts 4:36). When Saul was first converted and came to Jerusalem, those Christians were afraid of him (Acts 9:26), but Barnabas was there to encourage him (Acts 9:27). What if Barnabas had acted as the other Christians in Jerusalem on this occasion? What if Saul had become discouraged at Jerusalem? What a blessing Barnabas was to the life of Saul of Tarsus!

In the passage under consideration from the book of Galatians, what a blessing Paul is to the life of Barnabas! When Barnabas was carried away with the dissimulation and when he was down and discouraged, guess who comes to aid—Paul! The very one whom Barnabas had encouraged is there to encourage Barnabas when he needs it. It does not appear that Paul withstood Barnabas to the face for his mistake. Peter was to be blamed so Peter received the rebuke, but Paul was there also to encourage Barnabas and the others to get back up and do the right thing. We must learn that we reap what we sow. If we want to reap encouragement from our spiritual family, we need to be sowers of encouragement. To receive words of encouragement, we must give words of encouragement. Let us do as Barnabas did and use our words to encourage and exhort others “that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23).

The Lesson Of Corrections

From Paul, we learn the lesson of corrections. Paul corrected Peter because he was no longer walking “uprightly according to the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:14). Paul corrected Peter publicly, “I said unto Peter before them all” (Gal. 2:14). Paul’s correction of Peter was of a public nature because the wrongdoing of Peter was of a public nature. What Peter had done in withdrawing from the Gentiles had not been done

in a corner or in private. The Gentiles could see that Peter was treating them differently. The Jews could see that Peter was treating the Gentiles differently, and they even followed his example. His sin was public and had greatly influenced the church so it required a public correction from the apostle Paul.

It is appropriate to correct individuals when they no longer are walking uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel. If individuals are violating Scripture, it is right to approach them in a meek and gentle spirit (cf. Gal. 6:1) to attempt to restore them (Luke 17:1-4). If individuals are violating tradition or our feelings, we might should stop and think before we rebuke them. If the matter is of a private nature, then it needs to be handled privately (cf. Mat. 18:15). Two brethren who have a private problem should not make their matter public, but they should do all that they can to handle that in private. If the pattern of Scripture is followed, it may become public if the one in the wrong refuses to change, but that is not the goal. The goal is to handle it privately that it may be resolved and go no further.

It is appropriate sometimes to correct individuals publicly. Peter's public mistake needed public correction. Paul wrote to Timothy concerning public rebuke, "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:19-20). When public rebuke is necessary, it is not designed to destroy an individual but to correct him and to prevent others from following their example.

Paul approached Peter to restore him to the truth. When we approach problems, we should approach them with a desire to restore those involved to the truth. Let us put Galatians 6:1 into practice and restore those overtaken in the spirit of meekness.

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CHAPTER 29

Barnabas: A Man Full Of The Holy Ghost And Faith

B. J. Clarke

His given name was Joses, but the apostles nicknamed him “Barnabas” (son of consolation). As a Levite, he came from a priestly family. He was of the country of Cyprus. The foregoing facts, all recorded in Acts 4:36, are interesting but do not provide the most high definition portrait of the man. The inspired penman, Luke, defined in one sentence the essence of the man named Barnabas: “For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord” (Acts 11:24; KJV).

What made Barnabas such a good man? The answer is found in the second part of Acts 11:24. Barnabas was a good man because he was “full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” There are only four other passages in the King James Version of the New Testament that contain the exact phrase *full of the Holy Ghost*. The phrase is also used to describe Jesus (Luke 4:1), the seven men chosen to serve the needs of the widows in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 6:3; Acts 6:5), and Stephen (Acts 7:55).

The expression *filled with the Holy Ghost* is found more frequently in the New Testament. The angel informed Zacharias that John the Baptizer would “be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15).

When John's mother, Elisabeth, "heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost" (Luke 1:41). John's father, Zacharias, after a period of being unable to speak, had his mouth opened, and "was filled with the Holy Ghost" and prophesied (Luke 1:67).

The apostles were "filled with the Holy Spirit" in a unique way when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit (Mat. 3:11; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-4). When the apostle Peter was subsequently called to defend healing the lame man of Acts 3, he was "filled with the Holy Ghost" and responded (Acts 4:8ff). After the council ultimately let Peter and John go, they assembled with the saints and prayed. "When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

Ananias told Saul of Tarsus, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightiest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 9:17). A few chapters later, Paul is described still as being "filled with the Holy Ghost" when he set his eyes on Elymas, rebuked him, and struck him blind (Acts 13:9ff). At the conclusion of this same chapter, Paul and Barnabas came to Iconium after publishing the word of the Lord throughout all the region (Acts 13:49). It was a time of great celebration, for "the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 13:52).

A survey of the above passages indicates that the phrases *full of the Holy Ghost* or *filled with the Holy Ghost* are often associated with miraculous activity and bold proclamations of the Word of God. The recorded life of Barnabas most certainly matches this description. He and Paul "waxed bold" in their preaching (Acts 13:46). In fact, for "a long time" they

abode in Iconium “speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (Acts 14:3).

The bold preaching of Paul and Barnabas, combined with the signs and wonders done by their hands, led the people to lift up their voices in praise and to identify Paul and Barnabas as “gods...come down to us in the likeness of men” (Acts 14:11-12). Barnabas and Paul pleaded with the people to stop, cease, and desist their worship and to turn instead to worship “the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein” (Acts 14:15). Sometime thereafter, Paul was stoned and thought to be dead, but “he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe” (Acts 14:20).

As we think of these events, as they relate to Barnabas in particular, there is no doubt that he could do miracles. Before the Jerusalem council, “all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, **declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them**” (Acts 15:12, emp. mine throughout BJC). But is the miraculous ability of Barnabas all that is involved in the description that he was “full of the Holy Ghost”?

It must be remembered that the phrase *filled with the Spirit* does not always require miraculous activity. In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul instructed the church in general to “be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:18-19). In this context, when Paul commanded the Ephesians to “be filled with the Spirit,” he was not commanding them to do miracles. The parallel account in Colossians is quite helpful in identifying the meaning of the command to be filled with the Spirit. “Let

the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). Hence, we can be filled with the Spirit without having to do anything miraculous. We are filled with the Spirit when the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Eph. 6:17), fills our hearts so richly that our conduct is determined and ruled thereby (Col. 3:16).

This aspect of what it means to be filled with the Spirit must be incorporated into the discussion of the life of Barnabas. Did the Spirit empower him to do miracles? Yes, surely so, but is this the only influence the Holy Spirit exerted in the life of Barnabas? Surely not! Barnabas was not a good man merely because he could do signs and wonders by the power of the Holy Spirit. He was a good man because he was full of the Holy Spirit **and of faith**. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Hence, Barnabas was a good man because of the influence of the Word of God in his life.

That this is true is evident by exploring the scriptural definition of a good man elsewhere and then investigating the life of Barnabas to see this definition in demonstration. For instance, the Scriptures teach “the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (Psa. 37:23). With this springboard, let us examine how the Lord’s Word ordered the life of the good man Barnabas.

A Good Man Is A Giving Man

In the same context where we read that the Lord orders the steps of a good man, we also read that the righteous man is a man who is merciful, a man who “lendeth” to those who are in need (Psa. 37:26). This thought is echoed in Psalm 112:5 wherein we read, “A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth:

he will guide his affairs with discretion.” A few verses later, the Psalmist further describes this good, righteous man: “He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour” (Psa. 112:9).

With this Biblical backdrop, what do we find the good man Barnabas doing the first time we meet him in Scripture? We find him selling his land and bringing the money to the apostles (Acts 4:37), so that distribution might be made unto every man according as he had need (Acts 4:34-35). Barnabas was a giving man, which is part of what it takes to be a good man. The Proverbs writer affirmed, “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold” (Pro. 22:1). Barnabas had a good name because he was willing to sacrifice some of his wealth to help others in need. In short, Barnabas was a good man because he followed the Good Book!

A Good Man Is A Trusting Man

After Saul’s conversion, he tried to associate himself with the disciples at Jerusalem, but they were still afraid of him and did not believe his conversion was genuine (Acts 9:26). However, Barnabas was willing to trust Saul’s conversion as authentic, and so he took him under his wing and brought him to the apostles. Barnabas already had credibility with the apostles (Acts 4:36), and he presented a threefold case for trusting Saul’s conversion to be genuine: (1) He had seen the Lord in the way; (2) He had heard the Lord speak to him, and (3) He had, after his conversion, preached boldly at Damascus the name of Jesus (Acts 9:27). This time and effort Barnabas invested in standing up for Saul paid immediate dividends. After his visit, Saul “was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem” (Acts 9:28).

It is fair to ask the question: why did not someone else take Saul under their wing and make a special effort to express their confidence and trust in him? The answer is that they were not the man Barnabas was. He was a good man because he was a trusting man. His trust was not a blind trust. It was based on evidence, but he was willing to trust Saul and encourage others to do the same.

The willingness of Barnabas to trust others and to give them the benefit of the doubt eventually created a tension between Barnabas and Paul. For some unspecified reason, John Mark departed from the first missionary journey prematurely. When Paul suggested a second missionary journey to Barnabas, he was “determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark” (Acts 15:37). Paul would have none of it. In his mind, John Mark had deserted them, and Paul did not want to risk a repeat of the same (Acts 15:38). However, Barnabas would not back away from giving John Mark a second chance. He trusted him to come through this time, and when Paul would not back down, Barnabas took John Mark and sailed unto Cyprus to preach the gospel there (Acts 15:39). Meanwhile, Paul took Silas and went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches. (Acts 15:41). Some have suggested that the only reason Barnabas stood up for John Mark is because they were physically related (Col. 4:10). However, Barnabas stood up for Saul without being related to him by flesh and blood ties.

As it turned out, Barnabas did the right thing in trusting John Mark to do better the second time around. We know his trust was well placed because, near the close of his life, even Paul acknowledged the value of John Mark. He told Timothy, “Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11). We can only wonder what would have happened to John Mark’s faith if Barnabas had

written him off, too. Indeed, one of the reasons Barnabas was a good man is because he was a trusting man. He believed the best until he had reason to believe otherwise.

A Good Man Is A Trusted Man

When the disciples were scattered from Jerusalem by persecution (Acts 8:4), they “travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus and Cyrene...which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:19-20). The results of this preaching were marvelous—“a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21).

When this good news reached the ears of the church in Jerusalem, “they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch” (Acts 11:22). Of all the thousands of members in the church at Jerusalem, they chose Barnabas. Why send Barnabas rather than someone else? They sent Barnabas because he was a trusted man. He had gained their trust by the way that he lived his life before them. The actions of Barnabas show us that they made the right choice in trusting him to be the one to send.

He showed personal interest (“when he came,” Acts 11:23).

Many who are sent on a mission never accomplish the mission for which they were sent. “Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint (Pro. 25:19). However, Barnabas was not this type of messenger. He was faithful to complete the assigned task.

He showed personal emotion (“was glad,” Acts 11:23).

When Barnabas saw how the grace of God had impacted the lives of the lost, he “was glad.” Literally, he rejoiced at the number of souls who had been saved by their obedient response to the grace of God. Barnabas was no casual

observer. He was no hireling looking for a paycheck. He was emotionally invested in the salvation of the lost. Nothing thrilled him more than to see men respond to the Gospel.

He gave personal encouragement (“exhorted them all,” Acts 11:23).

Barnabas knew that it was not enough to baptize the taught; he knew that those who had been taught and baptized needed to be taught even more, namely, to observe all things that Christ commanded (Mat. 28:18-20). Consequently, he “exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23). Barnabas did not believe in a “dip ’em and drop ’em” style of evangelism. It is no wonder that the church entrusted to Barnabas a leadership role in the responsibility to strengthen the saved.

On another occasion, prophets from Jerusalem came to visit Antioch (Acts 11:27). One of them, named Agabus, predicted that a famine would come to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:28). Upon hearing this, the disciples in Antioch, “every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea, which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:29-30). If Barnabas had not been a trusted man, the brethren would not have entrusted him with delivering the financial aid to the brethren in Judea. Moreover, Barnabas was so trustworthy that although some had been unwilling to trust Saul, because Barnabas was by his side, Saul was now trusted to be one of the ones enlisted to help carry the aid to the brethren in Judea. Look how far Paul had come in the eyes of his brethren. He was now trusted implicitly, thanks to Barnabas! An honest man is a good man, and a good man is a trusted man.

Further evidence of just how trusted Barnabas was in the eyes of the early Christians is seen in his selection by

the church at Antioch to travel to Jerusalem to deal with the problem of the Judaizing teachers. Certain men had come to Antioch from Judea with the message that fleshly circumcision was necessary to salvation for both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 15:1). “When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question” (Acts 15:2).

Not everyone can be trusted to deal with church problems in a productive and uncompromising way. Some are too volatile; some are too passive. Others have the right temperament, but not the right knowledge. Barnabas possessed both the right knowledge and the right attitude. This is one reason why he was so highly regarded by the brethren.

Evidence of the immense respect he enjoyed among the brethren is indicated in the narrative of Acts 15. After several men, including Barnabas, addressed the multitude, it pleased “the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 15:23) with a letter, which contained the inspired decision of the council. Interestingly, in the body of the letter, we read these words: “It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you **with our beloved Barnabas** and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:25-26). Because Barnabas was a good man, both the church at Jerusalem and the church at Antioch trusted him.

A Good Man Is An Encouraging Man

Sometimes people are given a nickname that is the exact opposite of who/what they really are like. It is not unheard

of for a large man to be nicknamed “Tiny” or “Slim.” On the other hand, some people earn and continue to live up to their surname. Such is the case with Joses, whom the apostles nicknamed Barnabas, “the son of consolation.” The Greek word appears in its varied forms some 29 times in the New Testament. Almost half of these times it is translated *consolation*. On seven occasions it is translated *exhortation*, and six times the word is rendered *comfort*. The word *encouragement* is a good synonym for the meaning of the word.

As we read about Barnabas in the New Testament, it is not difficult at all to figure out why he was labeled the “son of encouragement.” He encouraged the needy brethren in the early days of the church’s history by selling some of his land to give to their needs. He vouched for Saul of Tarsus when no one else would give him a chance. Because Saul’s life was in danger, the brethren had to get him out of Jerusalem. They initially brought him to Caesarea and then sent him to Tarsus (Acts 9:30). This separated Saul from Barnabas, but Barnabas never forgot about Saul. After he accomplished his initial mission to strengthen the church at Antioch, Barnabas departed to Tarsus “to seek Saul” (Acts 11:25). Apparently, he realized that Saul could be a great asset to the evangelistic endeavors of the church of Christ at Antioch.

Barnabas, definitely, was determined to find Saul. The Greek word (*anazateo*) translated *seek* in Acts 11:25 is a word which indicates a persistent searching, a searching up and down, with great difficulty. Yet, the persistence of Barnabas was rewarded. “And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch” (Acts 11:26). Imagine how encouraged Saul of Tarsus must have been to realize that someone believed so much in him! Barnabas truly cared for Saul, as evidenced by how hard he was willing to work to find him.

He could not call him, email him, text him, or tweet him. Yet, Barnabas went the extra mile to locate Saul. Why did he do so? Because he wanted to encourage Paul and he knew that Paul could help the church at Antioch to explode with growth. Indeed, a good man seeks to encourage the church—not just the church as a whole, but the individual members of the church. This includes anyone in the church who needs to grow and the needy members of the church. In view of this mentality, Barnabas was a good man, because a good man is an encouraging man!

A Good Man Is A Worshiping Man

Barnabas, the encourager, knew of the tremendous encouragement that comes from assembling with the saints. Hence, we read that, after he brought Saul to Antioch, they assembled for a whole year with the church (Acts 11:26). The encouraging power of assembling with the saints to worship is very much the theme of Hebrews 10:23-25, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

It is worthy of note that “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” is directly tied to “exhorting one another” (Heb. 10:25). Even more interesting is the fact that the word translated *exhorting* is from the same word used to describe the exhorting that Barnabas did when he came to Antioch in Acts 11:23. It is also closely related to the same word the apostles used to describe Barnabas as the “son of consolation” (Acts 4:36). The point is this: Assembling with the saints encourages us and thus infuses us with the ability

to encourage one another. Barnabas assembled regularly with the saints, and thus he was constantly built up to build others up. He was a good man because he was a worshiping man.

A Good Man Is A Bible Man

Barnabas gave his money to the needy and gave his time to encourage men like Saul and John Mark. As important as this was, perhaps Barnabas does not receive as much notice for his steadfast commitment to know the inspired Word of God and to help others come to know it, too. Repeatedly in the Book of Acts, Barnabas is depicted as striving diligently to make God's Word known to the souls of men. At Antioch, he and Saul "taught much people" (Acts 11:26). In fact, he was listed as one of the "prophets and teachers" of the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). Although there were numerous prophets and teachers in Antioch, the Holy Spirit singled out Barnabas and Saul for the mission work of preaching the gospel on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:2-4).

At Salamis, Barnabas was involved in preaching the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews (Acts 13:5). Sergius Paulus, the deputy of the country, when he desired to hear the word of God did not call just for Paul. He "**called for Barnabas and Saul**, and desired to hear the word of God" (Acts 13:7). In Antioch of Pisidia, after Paul preached in the synagogue, "when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God" (Acts 13:43).

On the next Sabbath day almost the whole city came to hear the word of God (Acts 13:44). When some of the Jews saw the huge crowds, they were filled with envy and spoke against Paul's sermon. It was then that **both Paul and Barnabas waxed bold**, rebuked the unbelieving Jews,

and turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). They continued to publish the word throughout all the region (Acts 13:49) and the Jews continued to raise persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them out of their coasts (Acts 13:50). Unfazed, Paul and Barnabas simply shook off the dust of their feet against them and came unto Iconium (Acts 13:51) and rejoiced with the brethren (Acts 13:52).

At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas “went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed” (Acts 14:1). As usual, the unbelieving Jews tried to turn the Gentiles against the brethren (Acts 14:2). Nevertheless, Paul and Barnabas abode there for a “long time...speaking boldly in the Lord” (Acts 14:3). When they became aware of a death plot against them, they fled unto Lystra and Derbe, not to take a vacation, but to preach the gospel there as well (Acts 14:6-7).

When Paul was stoned and thought to be dead at Lystra, he astonished the disciples who stood round about him when he “rose up and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch” (Acts 14:20-21).

How remarkable the courage of Barnabas and Paul! They returned to the very places where men had sought their lives! What would possess them to enter such dangerous environs? They were determined to confirm the souls of the disciples and to exhort them to continue in the faith, and they wanted them to know that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). They were also determined to appoint elders in every church (Acts 14:23). As they headed back to Antioch of Syria, they

came to Pamphylia and preached the word in Perga, then went down into Attalia, and from there sailed to Antioch (Acts 14:24-26).

After reading this account it is not hard to figure out why the letter composed in Acts 15 made reference to how “our beloved brother Barnabas and Paul” are “men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:25). These men loved the Bible, i. e., God’s Word, and were willing to endanger their very lives to sow the seed of the kingdom, the word of God, into the hearts of the lost (Luke 8:11). They had a passion to preach the gospel. They were unashamed to preach the gospel as the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16). Their travels were not always easy, but they did not whine and complain about why God let this happen to them. They faced courageously every foe and conquered every fear.

A number of years ago, this author came across a short and simple poem, printed on single sheet of paper, with no source or attribution for the poem, except the name of the author. “The Bible Man” is attributed to Carl H. Bates, and Barnabas is just one Bible man to whom these words could apply:

THE BIBLE MAN

He stands behind the sacred desk,
A book held in his hand;
And as he speaks his brethren know
He is a Bible Man.

Upon the Scriptures, right, and truth,
He ever takes his stand
To make the gospel clear and plain
He is a Bible Man.

He loves the grand old Book divine,
He loves to preach the plan;
He loves the lost its message saves
He is a Bible Man.

Let skeptics doubt, and heathen rage,
And build their hopes on sand,
He loves, and lives, and teaches God's Book
He is a Bible Man.

When worlds shall end, and stars shall fall,
And at the throne we stand;
How sweet to hear the King's command,
Come home you Bible Man.

A Good Man Is Still A Man

As we conclude our study of this good man, Barnabas, we must hasten to observe that, as good as he was, he was still just a man. As such, he was not perfect. One of the most obvious examples of this is described in Galatians 2. Before the Jews came to Antioch to visit, the apostle Peter freely ate with the Gentiles. However, “when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas was also carried away with their dissimulation” (Gal. 2:12-13).

While we would not excuse Barnabas for caving in to “peer pressure,” it is interesting to note that Paul's very words show how out of character this was for Barnabas. It was not the norm for him to shun people. He was customarily the one bringing people together. This was so unlike Barnabas, but it just goes to show that even a good man, a giving man, a trusting man, a trusted man, an encouraging man, a

worshiping man, and a Bible man is still just a man needing to become a better man.

What nickname would those who know our spiritual lives best give us? Let us all live so that someone could say of us “he is a good man, ruled and governed by the Sword of the Spirit, and a man of faith.” If this can be said of us, then our influence will help much people to be added to the Lord!

Works Cited

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CHAPTER 30

Encouraging Those That Are Single

Clifton Angel

Sincere gratitude is expressed for this opportunity. The friendships developed with those that make up the Lord's church at Southaven are cherished by this writer. The names of every person deserving of thanksgiving will not be listed here, but special gratitude is extended to brethren Everson, Lambert, Schrimsher, Webster, and Jefferies for their labor with the Southaven church of Christ.

Introduction

As far as revelation has been provided, it is evident that Barnabas provided encouragement for at least one single person. After his conversion to Christ, Saul (more commonly known as Paul) was single in more than one way. Passages like 1 Corinthians 7:7(KJV) and 1 Corinthians 9:5–6 seem to suggest that Paul was not married. However, he was also “single” in that the disciples in Jerusalem “were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26). Barnabas was a tremendous encourager to one who was single in more than one way.

The common reality of being single is this: “I am by myself.” Maybe one believes this subject does not apply to many. Contrarily, Diana Garland reports, “At any given

time, almost half (43%) of Americans age 18 and above are unmarried. Of those, most (61%) have never married; almost a quarter (24%) are divorced; and 15% are widowed” (163–64). A great number of people are spending time being single—by oneself. In one episode of *The Andy Griffith Show*, the opening scene involves Barney playing checkers by himself. Andy arrives and questions Barney’s seemingly strange and very comical activity. Barney confidently replied indicating he also played other games by himself. Sometimes, when a person is single, he simply must learn how to do things by himself. Singles face tremendous challenges. Many of the challenges that singles face do not differ from the challenges that marrieds face, but very often, singles must face them “alone.”

Maybe one that is reading this has never been married. Maybe one that is reading this is single but in a dating or courting relationship. Maybe one that is reading this is now “single” because of a divorce. Maybe one that is reading this is a single parent because of ignorant or unwise decisions made in a time of temptation. Maybe one that is reading this is a widow or widower, thus being “single.” Maybe one that is reading this has a struggling marriage and sometimes thinks things would be better if one were “single.” Maybe one that is reading this is a parent or grandparent of a single person. Maybe one that is reading this knows someone that fits into any of the above categories. Therefore, maybe at least one can glean from the encouragement offered.

Countering Culture

“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). The ASV reads, “Let marriage be had in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers

God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). The world’s message is the exact opposite of God’s. Increasingly, marriage is being considered dishonorable, and it is being devalued.

To some, remaining single has become a seeming art to be praised. Implied in this “art” is the acceptance of immoral practices and the rejection of commitment. In his book *Singling: A New Way to Live the Single Life*, John R. Landgraf states, “Your singling time is an opportune time to become intimately familiar with your own sexual makeup and to learn to fulfill your own sexual needs” (122). How sad! Consider a few societal aspects that are constant obstacles for singles desiring to do what is right.

Divorce

“Before 1975, a spouse who wanted a divorce had to prove that the other had committed an act incompatible with marriage, such as infidelity...‘No fault’ laws removed this element” (Garland 47). That divorce is a problem in this world and in this nation is probably nothing new to readers of these words. However, what are some complications that divorce introduces into the lives of singles?

The **presence of divorce** has a tremendous impact on the lives of those who are single. Studies have shown how children of broken homes oftentimes grow into individuals who themselves will build broken homes or be afraid to have a home beyond singleness at all. Some have major commitment problems, trust problems, and certainly have a lower view of marriage and its honor. For many children that grow to be singles who make decisions, the defiled bed—fornication and adultery—may become the norm.

The **acceptation of divorce** is another cultural hurdle for singles. Recently, this author attended a minor league baseball game where a large advertisement in the outfield displayed “Divorce Incorporated *Your Family Law Team.*”

O, the irony! Increasingly, divorce is being glorified as a way of escape. If two become tired of one another, find others they believe will meet their emotional needs better, or believe that their goals in life are too different, it is as simple as getting a divorce and all problems will be solved—or so they think.

The truth about divorce is that, “Many adults who go through divorce experience it as more painful than the death of their partner” (Garland 228). Many decide to divorce with the mindset that it is the way of escape. Many decide to divorce thinking it will solve all of their problems. Immediately after a divorce, many have an initial sense of liberty. However, the long-term truth is that many of the same problems remain and the percentage of people that enjoy their life after divorce is very low. Divorce is a tremendous hindrance to the life and minds of those that are single.

Pornography

One dictionary defines pornography as “printed or visual material containing explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic or emotional feelings” (“Pornography”). Contrarily, the erotic cannot be separated from the aesthetic or emotional. Pornography greatly alters a person’s aesthetics and distorts a person’s emotions. Justin Lookadoo writes, rather informally, but informatively:

The fastest-growing destructive force in man’s relationship with women is the distorted image of women created by pornography. Guys fantasize about these ultimate women. They detach from reality and place themselves in the images they see. It’s *you* having sex with the beauty.

It's *you* being begged for more. The girls are perfect. They have perfect bodies and are willing. They become objects to be used for your own satisfaction and then left until you are ready for more. (220)

After noting ways that pornography destroys a man's sexual perception, Lookadoo goes on to say:

But let's say you venture out into the world of "real women" and hook up with a girl. Major letdown. She ain't gonna measure up to your 1-D cutie. She isn't going to be airbrushed to perfection. She isn't going to be a hot little nympho bent on satisfying your sexual fantasies. She is going to be human, fragile, gentle, rough, and vulnerable, and you aren't going to know what to do with her. In the end you'll end up alone in your room with your fake women who can't even talk to you. Porn doesn't make you a sex machine—it makes you a sex dumpster. (221)

Pornography is deceptive, addictive, and destructive. It has no place in the life of any human being, especially not in the life of a single Christian. In the same book as Justin Lookadoo, Hayley DiMarco writes of a subject that may be less considered—a subject she calls "Female Porn." "This is the #1 thing that distorts a girl's view of reality, men, and relationships. Maybe you haven't heard it called female porn. Maybe you know it by the softer, more acceptable terms of

‘chick flicks’ and romance novels” (Lookadoo 218). DiMarco goes on to reveal:

Your porn isn’t sexual, it’s romantic. But it gives you a warped view of men. Suddenly you think all men should be sexy, romantic, dangerous, daring, beautiful, etc ... In a two-hour sitting this perfect man saves the world, romances the girl, and takes her on the ride of a life-time. You watch this and fantasize about your hero. You become aroused by what you see and hear on the screen. You desire it. You dream about it. You are emotionally and sexually turned on by this fictitious man. (Lookadoo 218)

Then you are released into the world of real men with real flaws who cannot satisfy the desire in you that was ignited by female porn. If you have a man in your life, you begin to look at him in light of Mr. Perfect, and he can’t compare. He’ll never be as beautiful or romantic as the movie star with all the makeup and good lighting. See how it mimics male porn? It creates men who rescue you from out-of-control buses and shower you with rooms full of roses. They fly you off to Paris for the weekend and save you from the evil villain bent on destroying the world. *These men don’t exist.* Consciously or subconsciously, you are doing the same

thing men do to women by dreaming of that supermodel—you are imposing an impossible set of demands on your guy. (Lookadoo 219)

Considering the latter, countering culture involves knowing the realities and dangers surrounding the next category.

Hollywood

It is interesting that the name of a neighborhood in the heart of Los Angeles, California, has become a synecdoche referring to the whole of the motion picture industry, including the lives of the people involved. Apple's *Dictionary* records one definition for Hollywood as "the US movie industry and the lifestyles of the people associated with it" ("Hollywood"). Having a good friend from South Africa and having had an opportunity to visit the Philippines, this author knows that the influences of Hollywood are not limited to the United States—they are worldwide. It is a sad truth when one considers the messages that are heralded by this motion picture industry that pervades the globe.

Take the latter two categories—divorce and pornography—and any other category of immorality, wrap them into a bundle, glamorize them, make them the norm, make them accepted, and make them seem as if they provide happiness, and therein is the work of Hollywood. While the applause of immorality in the motion picture industry is nothing new, such applause has not always been as bold as it may seem today. While there are many avenues by which one can find out the content contained in a particular movie or show without watching it, many times the content is evident of the titles (e.g., *Californication*, *Sex and the City*, *Desperate Housewives*, and one of the latest, *Mistresses*). Is it possible

that such vivid depictions of immorality could affect the mind of a single person in a negative manner? It is not only a possibility—it is a fact! The negative effects of Hollywood are far longer lasting than the duration of the film or show, for the image is now in the memory of the viewer, and it is not going away easily.

Only three of the many areas having negative impacts on the lives of singles have been discussed. Certainly others include the legalization of **abortion** (more accurately known as murder)—which legalization has allowed millions to dispose of the precious human lives conceived by the results of their noncommittal immoral activities; **cohabitation** (the growing practice that is thought to be the test to prove a marriage will last, all the while making the chances far greater for a marriage to fail); and **feminism** (the greatest war launched on the female gender, by the female gender).

Countering culture is a continual combat for Christians. Corinthian Christians were surrounded by a culture of fornication, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, sodomy, thievery, covetousness, drunkenness, revilement, and extortion (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9–10). Far too often today, the Lord's people pay the price of admission to fill their minds with the images of such practices and find it entertaining. All this being said, it is not culture that Christians are countering. In actuality, it is sin being countered and combatted. Single Christians need not buy into the idea that the above sins are attractive—righteousness is attractive! Peter quoted the psalm of David, known today as Psalm 34, “For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open

unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (1 Pet. 3:10–12; cf. Psa. 34:12–16). If one is to “love life” and “see good days,” which is that to which every person is attracted, one must be righteous, countering sin through Jesus Christ.

’Tis The Season To Be Single

The above practices and concepts encourage perpetual singleness. This writer does not encourage perpetual singleness, as such encouragement would be contrary to God’s Word. However, Solomon recorded, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Ecc. 3:1). There are occasions in which a single person should be single. Said occasions will not be exhausted, but a few are noteworthy.

If one’s goal is not marriage, it is the season to be single—and single without a dating or courting relationship. Several years ago, this author was taught that if one is not ready to get married, one should not date or court. In an analysis of today’s non-committing culture, Joshua Harris wrote, “We date because we want to enjoy the emotional and physical benefits of intimacy without the responsibility of real commitment” (29). Such explorations are detrimental to the lives of singles and not fair to future marriages. Harris notes that “we need to reconnect the pursuit of intimacy with the pursuit of commitment” (28).

If one’s status does not allow marriage, it is a perpetual season to be “single.” Jesus said, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Mat. 19:9). If a person is divorced for any other reason than the occasion of said person’s spouse committing fornication, it is the season

to remain single. If a person has been “put away” because of fornication, for said person, it is the season to remain single. The latter truths are not mere ideas from this author—they are directions from “the author of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:9).

If there is a “present distress,” it may be the season to be single. There was such an occasion in Corinth in the lifetime of Paul. He wrote to them saying, “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I” (1 Cor. 7:8). Paul’s exhortation was for those who were single to remain single. Does Paul’s statement contradict God’s statement, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18)? No, for in the context of his writing, Paul noted that there was a “present distress” (1 Cor. 7:26). Some have suggested a war was taking place. Some have suggested there was a famine. Whatever the case, it was serious enough for Paul to encourage singles to remain single at that time.

“It Is Not Good That The Man Should Be Alone”

Truly, “The LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). However, is this verse taken out of its context? This was a very particular man who God said should not be without a spouse.

He had access to the tree of life.

“And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden” (Gen. 2:15). He was prepared in perfection. He lived in God’s presence. When his son Cain went eastward out of Eden, it is said that he “went out from the presence of the LORD” (Gen. 4:16). In Isaiah 51:3, Hebrew parallelism is used to describe Eden as “the garden of the LORD.” Today, access to the “tree of life” is only obtained through Christ. “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). “Blessed are

they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life” (Rev. 22:14).

He was trained to cultivate.

“And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it” (Gen. 2:15). Cultivation provides beauty. Cultivation brings out the best in soil, seed, and fruit. In like principle, man can learn to cultivate in other areas of life—bringing out the best in everything he possibly can. This was a tremendous skill for Adam to have before being given a spouse, for having an ability to bring out the best in her would prove very beneficial to their marriage.

He was trained to protect.

“And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15). The cultivation and protection of the garden worked close together in providing great preservation. Likewise, great benefits will be had in marriage if a man prepares himself to protect his future wife physically, emotionally, financially, and spiritually.

He was a student of God’s Word.

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17). This author is of the belief that it was Adam that taught his wife God’s Word, for she knew of what was right and what was wrong (Gen. 3:2-3).

Adam had access to the tree of life, being in the presence of God; he was trained to cultivate; he was trained to protect; and he was a student of God’s Word. It is this type of man that God said should not to be alone. Perhaps if one does not desire these preparations, he should be alone. One may have heard the supposed African proverb, “A man without

a wife is like a vase without flowers.” It is in agreement with an inspired proverb, “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD” (Pro. 18:22). In keeping with the whole of the Bible, it is safe to assume that one reason such a discovery is “a good thing” is because the man has prepared himself to care for a wife. Considering the African proverb, the vase has to be prepared and formed prior to being able to uphold the flowers. If the glass were formed around the flowers, it would not appear as a vase; most likely, said glass would not be able to support the flowers in an upright position. It would not allow proper nourishment for the flowers. Destruction is inevitable. Likewise, if a man (and woman) does not prepare himself prior to marriage to care for his spouse, destruction is inevitable. Adam was a man who was prepared by God. That did not mean Adam would make perfect choices, but it did mean he was prepared in a perfect manner.

While You Wait

Hebrews 13:1–8 is not written to singles only, but singles are certainly included in the audience, and the principles therein are priceless for the person looking forward to making the most of single life while waiting for married life. Starting at the end and tracing back to the beginning of the passage, there are at least seven needs seen that are applicable to singles.

Christ

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8). Singles need Christ—first and foremost. Without Christ, one will be “single” for eternity, rejected by God and cast into “outer darkness” (Mat. 25:30). The single man encouraged by Barnabas wrote these words: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

When others, even the closest of friends and loved ones, fail you, Jesus Christ remains the same! In a world of deception, He is dependable. In a world of decay, He is everlasting. In a world of despair, He is one's delight. In a world of doubt, He is established. In a world of differences, He is the same!

Conditioning

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (Heb. 13:7). It is a tremendous need for each single person to respect authority and recognize the need for training. Will one allow himself to be conditioned by true authority? Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus about the training of young men and young women. He made mention of very needful and very practical principles that would condition singles in preparation for all of life, including marriage.

Courage

“So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:6). One definition of courage is “strength in the face of pain or grief” (“Courage”). Pain and grief are inevitable in this life; therefore, every single person will benefit by being instilled with courage provided by Christ.

Confidence

“For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5b). A spouse may leave indefinitely. A spouse may “forsake” in continuously not providing an emotional need. A husband may “forsake” his obligation to love his wife on one occasion, repent of it, and she will need to forgive him. A wife may “forsake” her obligation to respect her husband on one occasion, repent of it, and he will need to forgive her. But the Lord “will never leave you, nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).

Contentment

“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have” (Heb. 13:5a). Do not be a lover of money. Too many believe the lies that other things and other people will provide joy and happiness. Joy and happiness are not provided by what one does not have, but by the acceptance and pleasure of what a Christian does have. This concept is called contentment. In the context, Christians are being addressed. If one is not a Christian, one should not be content until he is in Christ. However for one that is a Christian, contentment in the providence of God is a must. Too many ladies believe the lie that a boyfriend or husband will provide them happiness. Too many men believe the lie that a girlfriend or wife will provide them happiness. While each are superficially seeking different fulfillments, neither will be happy if that is the mindset. When one can find contentment in Christ, no matter the position in life, it is then that one can be happy. It is then that a companion can aid in that happiness, especially if said companion also is content in Christ. He is the only One that will “never leave you, nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).

Commitment

“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). This verse is pervaded with commitment—commitment before marriage, commitment to marriage, and commitment within marriage. Many today choose to remain single to avoid commitment. Commitment stems from and reinforces the latter needs of singles.

Consideration

“Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (Heb. 13:1-3). This author sees three principles of love: (1) Love the brethren; (2) Love strangers; and (3) Love one’s neighbor as oneself. Being in Christ, staying close to Christ, and emulating Christ will lead one to embrace these three areas of being considerate of the needs of others. Embracing these three areas of being considerate of the needs of others will keep one close to Christ, all the while increasing one’s commitment, contentment, confidence, courage, and conditioning.

Conclusion

Maybe at least one can glean from the encouragement that has been offered through the above discussions: countering sin, knowing the proper seasons for singleness, learning of the way God prepares a man for marriage, and suggested needs for making the most of the single life (really, any Christian life). Furthermore, how can one encourage another that is single? Look to Barnabas’ example.

And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. (Acts 9:26–28)

Barnabas “took” Saul (Acts 9:27). It is the verb that described how the Lord “caught” Peter by the hand when Peter was sinking in the ocean (Mat. 14:31). It is the verb that described how the Lord “took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town” so that He could give him sight (Mark 8:23). It is the verb that described how the Lord “took a child, and set him by him” so that He might teach His disciples about humility and innocence (Luke 9:47). A single man has completely changed the direction of his life, only to be rejected by those to whom he was now conjoined. “But Barnabas took him” (Acts 9:27). Furthermore, Barnabas led Saul to those in highest authority among Christians on earth—the apostles—and defended his discipleship with a three-fold testimony: He saw the Lord, He talked to the Lord, and He has preached the Lord. Barnabas’ encouragement for a man who was single in more ways than one proves to be a great encouragement to everyone today.

As was previously noted, many of the challenges that singles face do not differ from the challenges that marrieds face, but very often, singles must face them “alone.” In 2008, Tom Holland offered these words audibly at the Memphis School of Preaching Lectureship: “As long as God is my Father, I am not alone. As long as the Son of God is my Savior, I am not alone. As long as I am in the family of God, I am not alone. As long as the joy of salvation is in my heart, I am not alone. As long as the peace of God guards my mind, I am not alone. As long as hope inspires my soul, I am not alone. So why should I be lonely when I’m not alone?”

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CHAPTER 31

The One Hope: Encouraging People To Think About Heaven

Kyle Gilpin

The topic at hand is one of extreme importance. Christians are to be a people who are encouraging of each other. They are to help one another bear burdens (Gal. 6:2; KJV), provoke one another to love and to good works (Heb. 10:24), and so many other things. One thing that may be lacking in some, however, is the encouragement to hope for a better future. Paul mentioned that hope when he wrote Ephesians 4:4, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.” It is that “one hope” that is under consideration at this time.

There are so many occasions to see the negativity that exists in the world that sometimes one might miss the opportunities to look towards the sunrise, beyond the grave, and into the home awaiting the saints of God. It is the aim of the author to encourage each one to understand more about hope itself, see how hope is viewed according to the Scriptures, and cultivate a desire to spread hope to all around. There is a better day coming. The Christian’s hope for it will be what makes a difference in this life and in the life to come.

Clarification Of Our Hope

Before one can fully appreciate what it means to hope, one must first define the word, gain some knowledge from its history, and see how it is defined and used in the Scriptures.

The English Word Hope

The word *hope* is thought to have come from the Old English word *hopa* and the Middle High German word *hoffe* (“Hope,” Collins). It also has a close relation to the word *hop*. It is not difficult for one to see why these two words would be grouped as having similar backgrounds. One who is hoping for something in the future is, either literally or figuratively, hopping with excitement. For the Christian, there is no stretching of the imagination required to complete this thought. When he thinks of the promises for those who love the Lord (cf. Heb. 11:6), he should jump in anticipation. One has to believe that the apostle John, when penning the closing words of inspiration, had this kind of “hopping excitement,” finishing the Word of God with “Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all” (Rev. 22:20-21).

Others, in a more modern setting, have defined *hope* as being “the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will [*sic*] turn out for the best” (“Hope”). Many have shortened the definition to something of an equation: Hope equals desire plus expectation. While this is a workable definition for an overview of the subject, it does not capture the full meaning of the word *hope*, especially when one notices it in a Biblical context. In order to do that, a brief study of the original language may be necessary.

The Greek Word Elpis

The Greek word that is used by the writers of the New Testament is even more telling than the modern English. The word that is so often used is *elpis*, which means “desire of

some good with expectation of obtaining it” (Zodhiates). The New Testament writers used this word eighty-five times. The translators of the Scriptures saw fit to render the word *elpis* as *hope* sixty-nine out of the eighty-five instances in which it was found. For example, when Paul was explaining to the Romans the purpose of the Old Testament, he wrote, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope [*elpis*—KG]” (Rom. 15:4). He also wrote to the Colossians saying, “For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel” (Col. 1:5).

Though *elpis* is translated *hope* most of the occasions it is used, the translators also found it fitting to render the Greek word in other ways as well. This does nothing but adds to one’s understanding of the word itself. Fifteen verses contain the word *elpis* but the English word that is used is not *hope* but *trust*. Paul in his introductory statements in one particular letter writes,

But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust [*elpidzo*—KG] that he will yet deliver us. (2 Cor. 1:9-10)

The reader will notice that Paul, in the above passage, makes a strong case for the power of hope when he uses two different Greek words, each of which is translated *trust*. According to verse nine, when referring to the trust, or lack thereof, he and his traveling companions had in themselves,

he uses the word *peitho* meaning “to persuade, particularly to move or affect by kind words or motives” (Zodhiates). Yet when he refers to the trust they have in God to deliver them he uses a variation of the word *elpis*, which means “to wait with joy and full confidence” (Thayer). Using these two meanings, one can better appreciate his statements to the brethren at Corinth. When faced with danger on all sides, the apostle would rather place his trust and hope in God than to attempt to persuade himself and those with him to believe that they could deliver themselves out of all that threatened them. To the apostle Paul, placing your hope in God meant more than being excited about the future promises. It meant that his full trust and confidence was placed in the hands of the One Who was able to save him, both in this life and in the life to come.

There is one other occasion where the word *elpis* is used. On this occasion it is translated neither as *hope* nor as *trust* but rather as *faith*. The Hebrews writer, when encouraging his readers to stay on the new and perfect Way wrote, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith [*elpis*—KG] without wavering (for he is faithful that promised)” (Heb. 10:23). This inspired writer wanted them (and Christians in all centuries) to remain faithful by holding on to Him Who perfected them: Christ Jesus. This could only be done by their hope in Him and never being shaken or persuaded to leave Him. One is reminded of the words of the apostle Paul when he wrote, “Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the word of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Only when a Christian has placed completely his hope in the Lord can he stand firm against all that might shake others.

Taking all three of these uses for the Greek word *elpis* one can easily see that the word *hope* means much more

than merely “looking forward to something.” The word *hope* carries with it the idea of desire and expectation but with the added ingredients of faith, trust, and confidence placed in the provider of that which is expected.

Characteristics Of Other Hopes

Like nearly everything in life, there are originals, and there are counterfeits. There are original autographs of Mickey Mantle. There are many more counterfeited or forged autographs of Mickey Mantle as well. Many hold that the originals are far more valuable than the counterfeits. While this may be the case, or is at least debatable, in some instances, when discussing religious matters, this is absolutely true. As with the subject at hand, there is one, true hope, but there are many counterfeits of which one must be aware. Before noticing the Christian’s true hope, perhaps a mention of other hopes will aid in the appreciation of the original.

An Unoccupied Hope

Unfortunately there exists a hope which has nothing of substance. Those which have it could also be described as being without hope. Paul depicted those without salvation as being those with an unoccupied hope. The apostle wrote,

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.
(Eph. 2:11-12)

Before the Ephesian brethren were Christians, their state was one of despair and reproach, to say the very least. Paul indicated that, before their conversion, they were without Christ, aliens, strangers from the covenants of promises, being without God, and having no hope. Perhaps nothing could be more unfortunate than this last phrase. When one is outside of Christ, he is a stranger from all that is found in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:3). When one is outside of Christ he is without hope in this world and in the world to come. Too many people find themselves with an unoccupied hope. The gospel is the power of God to salvation (Rom. 1:16) and it is God's power to give man hope in this hopeless world.

Paul again mentions this group when explaining the nature of the second coming to the Thessalonians. Paul wrote, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep [dead- KG], that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 The. 4:13). The church at Thessalonica had an unfortunate attitude about death. To them, once someone had passed away, he would never be seen by anyone again. Paul had to correct them by saying that those who had died would be seen again. In the resurrection of the dead, all would be seen. Paul strengthened his message by comparing that with the world's view of death, which the Thessalonians were accepting. The world views death as the end of life. Once a loved one has been entombed, there is no hope of seeing that person alive again. How sad! Paul and other Biblical writers pictured death as being a change (1 Cor. 15:51) not an end. Death to the world is a hopeless destination. Death to the Christian is a change for the next life. Though others may be sorrowing, the Christian closes his eyes in death only to wake up in glory! It is little wonder why the Psalmist wrote "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psa. 116:15). Facing death

with an unoccupied hope is a terrible plight, and one which man need not experience.

An Unfounded Hope

While many live without hope, there are others who live with what they believe to be true hope, but in reality is simply a counterfeit of the original. The culture of the early twenty-first century has “watered down” the definitions of certain words. For example, consider the word *faith*. Many dictionaries report that faith is “belief that is not based on proof” (“Faith”). The Biblical definition is far different. Faith is knowledge based on substance and evidence (Heb. 11:1).

Hope is another example of a word that is used improperly in this age. Many use it haphazardly to mean a desire but with no true expectation of the outcome. For example, someone who spent little time studying for an exam might afterward say, “I hope I did well,” when in actuality there is no expectation that the grade will reflect anything but his poor preparation. The Bible contains examples of those whose hopes were unfounded or did not contain all the elements of true hope.

1 Kings 18 records the account of Elijah’s competition with the prophets of Baal. While Elijah’s hope was rightly placed in the God of heaven, the 450 prophets had an unfounded hope. Notice 1 Kings 18:26 and 1 Kings 18:28-29:

And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made... And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner

with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.

The prophets had the right expectation: they expected their sacrifices to be set aflame. The prophets had the right desire: they wanted to win the competition with Elijah so much so that they cut themselves and cried out all day and night. Unfortunately for them, though they had the right expectation and the right desire, they did not have the right object. They were placing their unfounded hope in the wrong god. Baal could do nothing about their desires. As pure and intense as their desire may have been, because their hope was unfounded, they were left wanting.

Matthew records an example of another type of unfounded hope, one that has the right object and the right expectation, but lacks the right desire. Jesus said:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matt. 7:21-23)

Those found in this group had the right expectation for their hope: Entrance into heaven. They also, to their credit, had the right object: Jesus Christ Himself. Their hope, however, was unfounded in that it did not have the right desire: To do the will of the Father. Far too many will hear these unfortunate words of Jesus and will be devastated, all because they refused to obey God in everything, all the while expecting to receive the joys of the Lord.

The third and final unfounded hope can be examined, thanks to the words of Paul to the young man Timothy. Paul wrote to him, saying, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). The group about which Paul warned Timothy was characterized as having the wrong expectation. Whatever the object and desire may have been, these individuals were not pleasing to God because they lacked the right expectation. Their expectations caused them to fear. This attitude is something, according to Paul, which did not come from God. It is interesting to note that fear can be a powerful motivator (2 Cor. 5:11), but it is, in no way, the best motivator (cf. 1 John 4:18). The hope of the Christian, unlike this unfounded hope, expects the very best; there is no fear in the one hope.

Components Of The One Hope

Now that the counterfeit hopes have been examined, the attention is focused on the one true hope. When all others have failed, it is the one hope that will lead the Christian on into eternity. As has been mentioned above, an elementary definition of hope can be “Desire plus expectation.” Using this very basic design, a study of the one hope will now ensue.

The Right Object

The one hope of Ephesians 4 must have the right object. This is something, which, on the outside, seems very simple.

There has to be something for which to hope. This is obviously true, but the one hope focuses on one particular object: an eternal home in heaven given by God. Paul mentions this type of hope several times in his writings. For example, in his letter to Titus, Paul wrote, “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Tit. 1:2). The Christian’s object for hoping is eternal life in heaven. Nothing less will suffice. Nothing less is acceptable.

Paul mentions this object, once more, in to his letter to the church at Colosse. He wrote, “For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel” (Col. 1:5). Paul was thankful for the brethren there (Col. 1:3), but also for the hope that they maintained: the hope of heaven. When one has heaven as his object, his hope is well on its way to being the one of Ephesians 4.

The Right Desire

Though the object is important, there are other components that make up the one hope. One of these is the right desire. What is the Christian’s desire, in reference to his hope? While the object is a home in heaven, the desire is something closely related.

The Hebrews writer, in one of the most familiar chapters of the entire book, mentions this desire in relation to those who have died in faith. He writes,

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare

plainly that they seek a country... But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. (Heb. 11:13-14; Heb. 11:16)

One will notice that the faithful mentioned here (Abel, Enoch, Noah, etc.) desired a better country. They desired something more than this world could have offered them. Their desire, however, went beyond what they wanted. It controlled their actions. Notice verse 13 of the text. The Hebrews writer says these individuals, though they had not received the promises in their lifetimes, embraced them and confessed that they were not from this country. What were they doing? Noah, Abel, Abraham, and all the rest were constantly saying, through their actions, "I am not meant for this world." Their desire caused them to act differently than those of the world who have different desires.

If the Christian's object of hope is heaven, then his desire will of necessity be one that causes him to live for that place. Notice Heb. 11:14, where the writer states, "For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country." Christians should desire heaven so fervently that it causes them to prepare for it each moment of their lives (Mat. 7:19-21). When they do so, they are telling the world that they are sojourners, pilgrims, travelers who are moving on to something far better. Hope has the desire.

The Right Expectation

The third and final component of the one hope that will be discussed here is the right expectation. Without this, hope is not really hope. This third part is as important as the other two. The expectation is necessary. How insincere

it would sound for one to say he hoped for heaven, but when asked if he expected it would answer in the negative. Too many Christians fall into a trap of wanting to appear pseudo-modest when they leave a doubt that heaven will be their home. Certainly, no one should be so bold as to imply that he could trust in himself to lay hands on eternal life, but neither should he be so modest as to appear doubtful that God will keep His promises! As long as the Christian's object is heaven, and his desire is to live in accordance to God's law, then eternal life is the only possible expectation that exists! Hold to it. Believe it will happen. Know it will happen!

Paul was not "overstepping his boundaries" when he said "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). Was there any doubt with Paul when it came to his expectation after this life? Not at all! Was he boasting in any way? Not in himself. His hope, just like his faith, was in God almighty.

Look again at the boldness of Paul when he said,

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Tim. 4:6-8)

Because of the blood of Christ and the grace of God, Paul could have confidence in his eternal destination. Each of the components of the one hope is included in this

message to Timothy. Paul's object was heaven ("a crown of righteousness"), his desire was living for heaven ("I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"), and his expectation was that he would receive it ("there is laid up for me a crown... which the Lord... shall give me"). There was no doubt with Paul. When it comes to the Christian's hope, there should be no doubt as well. That is the Christian's hope. That is the one hope!

Case Of The Only Hope

Now that each component has been examined, the one hope can fully be appreciated in its Biblical context. The Bible contains some incredible word pictures that one can see quite vividly. It is no different when it comes to the topic of hope. These pictures allow one to understand what the one hope should be. In a Biblical context, what is hope?

A Light In A Time Of Darkness

According to the Scriptures, the years following the reign of Solomon were very tumultuous and dangerous, especially during the time of Rehoboam. Solomon's heir had foolishly chosen to listen to unwise counselors and taxed heavily the people of Israel. As a result, the kingdom was divided, with ten tribes in the north taking the name Israel, and two tribes in the south being called Judah. In the coming years, kingdoms of the world, such as Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and many other smaller nations would come in and plunder, destroy, and, in some cases, take many into captivity. One might very well look at such a bleak path and determine that God had abandoned His people. While it is true that He gave His people over to their own desires and their consequences, He still left them hope for reconciliation.

1 Kings 15:4 says, "Nevertheless for David's sake did the Lord his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son

after him, and to establish Jerusalem.” Though many terrible things happened to the nations of Israel and Judah, though many rulers who were descendants of David did not walk in the ways of the Lord, God still left a light on, as it were, for the people to have hope. What was the light? A descendant of David was on the throne. Because of the promises made to, and the love for David, God allowed David’s progeny, righteous and unrighteous alike, to reign over Judah. God kept His promises to David and will keep all His promises to all people. There was a lamp of hope in the darkness.

Though God eventually gave His people into the hands of another nation for a time, His light was still shining into the darkness. It was into the blackness that God sent forth His Son to be the light of hope for mankind. John 1:4-5 states, “In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” No matter how black sin can be, there is still hope for salvation while on this side of eternity. In a time of darkness, hope acts as a light.

A Nail In A Time Of Doubt

A rather interesting word picture of hope is found in Ezra 9. According to the text, Cyrus, the king of the Medo-Persian Empire, had allowed the Jews to return to their homeland, to rebuild their walls and their temple, and had given them letters of decree and materials to help with their progress. In looking back over their recent history, Ezra commented that their fathers had sinned, even though they had been granted mercy, and were taken away as a result of that sin. But of the present time of return, Ezra said,

And now for a little space grace hath
been showed from the Lord our God, to
leave us a remnant to escape, and to give

us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. (Ezra 9:8)

Ezra was appreciative of the seemingly small hope that he had, because it meant that the Lord was keeping His promises. Ezra did not necessarily want the whole building. He was thankful for but a nail. That was enough for him, because if the Lord promised a return from captivity (and He did), then Ezra knew it would come to pass (and it did).

When one looks at God's promises and his hope for them, he should be assured that God will keep them, no matter how much time has passed since their inception (2 Pet. 3:9). Hope can be that nail, that small but sure ray of hope that will get him through to the end. That nail was enough for Ezra. The one hope is always enough.

A Door In A Time Of Deliverance

A third picture given in the Scriptures concerning hope is that it is a door during a time when deliverance is needed. During the difficult times leading up to the captivity of both Israel and Judah, many prophets were sent to the people warning them of impending danger if repentance was not made. Many of these prophets described with great detail the wrath that was to come. This would certainly be a time when deliverance would be sought.

The prophet Hosea mentions not only the difficulties, but also the deliverance. According to Hosea 2:12-13, the Lord would destroy all that Israel held dear. Their fig trees, food, idol gods, and so many more things would be taken from them. They would be lost in captivity with no help coming from Baal or others whom they worshipped. Then God mentions the small gleam of hope that they would have:

And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. (Hos. 4:15)

No matter how much His people defied Him, no matter how much they sinned against Him, God still loved Israel and wanted them back. He still wanted to give them hope. He stated that after everything was destroyed He would give them a vineyard and the valley of Achor for a door of hope. It may not seem like much from the outset, but God was giving His people hope for their return to His side. The valley of Achor, according to Hailey, was “a barren and desolate area west of the north end of the Dead Sea, where Achan and his family had been stoned” (143). This seemingly empty portion of land would be a door for their return into the joys of the Lord. While in captivity, the people could recall the door that was there for their return. After their years were finished, they could walk through that door ready to be the people God had intended them to be.

A New Testament example of this seems appropriate as well. Paul mentions this door of hope in his first letter to the Corinthians. Paul said

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. (1 Cor. 10:13)

When a Christian is tempted to sin, he can find comfort in at least two facts. First, he is able, with God's help, to overcome that particular temptation. And second, he will have a way of escape to avoid that sin. That hope that is there, even when one is seemingly caught in temptation, acts as a door. It is the door that allows him to walk through without having to bow to sin. What a marvelous blessing hope is!

A Helmet In A Time Of Danger

Hope is also seen as being a helmet in dangerous times. When a soldier goes to war, he is never to be without his helmet, especially during battle. It protects him from things that would otherwise inflict serious injury or even death. To say the helmet is important is an enormous understatement. The same could be said of the Christian soldier and hope.

Paul mentions this helmet in his first letter to the church at Thessalonica. Though not as thorough as his discussion to the Ephesians on the Christian armor (Eph. 6:11-17), he nonetheless describes a few essential components of the Christian's protective gear. He states, "But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation" (1 The. 5:8). The hope of salvation is what protects the Christian's head during battle. When one's objective is heaven, desire is to walk as Jesus, and expectation is that the promise will be fulfilled, there is nothing Satan or anyone else can do to take that from him. Hope is a helmet when dangerous times are present.

An Anchor In A Time Of Disturbance

Many are familiar with the song, which contains the line "We have an anchor that keeps the soul, steadfast and sure while the billows roll." The idea that hope is an anchor is not original to this song, but rather to the Scriptures, in particular the book of Hebrews. The writer of this great book wrote to

keep people from returning to the Law of Moses. The Way of Christ was and is better than all the others combined. This Way had a better Law Giver, worship, sacrifice, and many other things. One of these is mentioned by the writer in Hebrews 6:18-19,

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.

For what better hope could one ask? The people of God have fled to Him for safety to lay hold on eternal life. Not only does hope act as an anchor, but also that anchor is fastened beyond this life into the world to come (“that within the veil”). The power of hope is clearly seen in that Christians have hope in a promise that is made by God who cannot lie (Heb. 6:18; Tit. 1:2). God be praised for His unending gifts and for the hope that every Christian has in Christ, as a sure and unwavering anchor of the soul.

Conclusion

On December 17, 1927, a Coast Guard cutter called the USS *Paulding* collided with the S-4 submarine just off Cape Cod, near Provincetown, MA. The latter sunk to the bottom of the bay in a hundred feet of water. Rescue efforts immediately were undertaken to look for possible survivors, but strong storms and undercurrent thwarted the proceedings.

Hours of waiting turned into days before a few divers were able to reach the broken submarine. One diver heard tapping coming from within the hull. The tapping was actually a message in Morse code from one of the survivors. The message sent over and over from inside was “Is... there... any... hope?” The storms and undercurrent had made rescue impossible, so one of the divers had to send one of the bleakest messages ever to be sent. He tapped a single message to those trapped in the submarine, “There... is... no... hope.” A week later when the wreckage was salvaged and brought to the surface, the bodies of all sailors assigned to the S-4 were recovered.

Christians find themselves living in a world that is groping in sin. Men everywhere are asking the question, “Is there any hope?” Fortunately for all, the answer that can be sent is a resounding, “Yes!” The gospel is man’s only hope for eternal life. If they are to hear it, Christians need to take it. Give hope freely where hope is needed. It is a light in darkness, a nail in times of doubt, a door of deliverance, a helmet for danger, and an anchor in times of disturbance. Speak words of life to a world adrift in death, knowing that God wants all men to be saved and have the hope for, and the trust and confidence in heaven above.

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CHAPTER 32

And The Contention Was So Sharp: Encouraging Brethren To Resolve Conflicts

Tom Holland

It is both interesting and potentially encouraging to study how disagreements among brethren, even sharp contentions, which indicates literally “a sharpening, hence a sharpening of the feeling...denotes an incitement...the effect of irritation” (Vine, “Contention”), can eventually work for good. Our English word *contention* denotes “strife, conflict, struggle, dispute, argument” (Webster).

There are some important lessons in the events involving a serious disagreement between two great servants of the Lord that led to a parting of ways. In this presentation we will observe first how the action of a person at the moment may not seem important but later can have such a negative impact on a special relationship. Second, we will trace the kindness and Christian service that should have generated a firm bonding of brethren. Third, we will emphasize that the lesson involves a matter of judgment, not a doctrinal disagreement. Fourth, this lesson will end on positive and encouraging information that one who had caused trouble between brethren can be forgiven and can

demonstrate that confidence placed in him can be rewarded with effective service.

John Mark A “Dissenter”?

A decision that Mark made on the first missionary journey of Barnabas and Saul accompanied by Mark resulted in a “sharp contention.” They had preached on the Island of Cyprus. They preached at Salamis in the Jewish synagogues. The inspired history wrote, “They also had John as their assistant” (Acts 13:5; NKJV) or “minister” (KJV). The word translated *assistant* (ASV, NKJV) means “a helper who willingly submits himself to carrying out the will of the one over him” (Rogers 259). “They,” both Barnabas and Saul, had Mark as their assistant. The problem that Mark eventually caused was not creating jealousy in Saul because only Barnabas was being served by Mark.

The Cyprus work took them to Paphos where the proconsul Sergius Paul called for Barnabas and Saul “and sought to hear the word of God” (Acts 13:7). But a Jew by the name of Elymas, a sorcerer and a false prophet sought “to turn the proconsul away from the faith” (Acts 13:8). Saul’s name was changed at Paphos from Saul to Paul and Paul took the leadership role and through the power of the Holy Spirit Paul caused Elymas to have a temporary blindness.

Paul and those with him journeyed north to Perga in Pamphylia. Then this statement is made, “and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem” (Acts 13:5). Some writers have spent time speculating as to the reason Mark left them. Did Mark get homesick? Did Mark fear the troubles they might encounter such as fear of diseases? However, the reasons Mark left them is not the focal point of his action. What Mark did is important because that decision

Mark made that day would later cause a “sharp contention” between two close brothers in Christ.

There are examples of people making decisions which, at the time, may not have seemed too significant, but later the decision would have devastating results in relationships. I will not go into detail, but each general example I present could be explained in the details. There are times when preachers’ children in school and community situations have felt pressure from their peers to prove they do not practice what their daddy preaches. So instead of being moral leaders, they became rebel followers and their decision not only had a negative influence on their daddy’s work, but also disrupted the family.

Preachers have made a decision to visit pornographic sites on the internet and they were “hooked” by hookers. This decision has cost preachers their jobs, but in some situations it has resulted in break-ups of the family. Some elders have resigned because they were addicted to online pornography.

Some preachers’ wives have made a decision to leave their husbands and children. One preacher’s wife left her family for a lover, but finally the excitement was gone and later in life she said, “I have made the mistake of a lifetime.”

These are but a few real-life decisions that have had serious consequences. These are all negative examples to show how a decision such as Mark’s decision can have far-reaching consequences.

The Spiritual Ties And Special Friendship Of Barnabas And Paul

Barnabas by his nature must have been a kind and gentle man, a man who could see the potential good in people. Barnabas could motivate people to be good and to do good. He was an encourager, so much so that the Apostles named

him Barnabas, although his birth name was Joses or Joseph. Barnabas means “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36). The Scripture says that Barnabas “was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:24).

Furthermore, following his conversion in Damascus, Saul came to Jerusalem. Saul had preached Jesus in the synagogues in Damascus, and the Jews plotted to kill Saul, but the disciples took Saul, put him in a basket and let him over the wall of the city at night so he escaped death.

Saul came to Jerusalem and tried to join the Jerusalem disciples, but they were all afraid of him. “But Barnabas took him and brought him to the Apostles and he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.” On Barnabas’ recommendation, Saul was accepted as a true disciple (Acts 9:21-28, esp. verse 27).

The Jews in Jerusalem reacted to Saul the way the Jews in Damascus had, “they attempted to kill him” (Acts 9:29). The brethren in Jerusalem brought Saul to Caesarea and sent him to his house in Tarsus.

Later, Barnabas went to Tarsus looking for Saul and brought him to Antioch. For a year Barnabas and Saul “assembled with the church and taught a great many people” (Acts 11:26).

Then Barnabas and Saul went on a tour of preaching the gospel. There is a unique bonding of brethren who work together in preaching and teaching the word of God, facing opposition together, encouraging one another when the days are difficult, praying together, and rejoicing in the successes of the gospel as people become obedient to the faith.

All of this bonding in the Lord’s work in addition to Barnabas’ disposition and his help of Paul, plus Saul’s reason to be grateful for all Barnabas had done for him, make it

almost unreal that these two brothers should have such a sharp contention between them.

Later, Paul would write by inspiration of the Holy Spirit the importance of what he had personally experienced, namely, the importance of brethren being “perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10; ASV). The solution to their sharp contention was for brethren to go their separate ways while still committed to the spread of the gospel. Their solution was not for one or both to become angry and quit the church! Have you not seen this happen? A brother or sister has a “sharp contention” with a brother or sister and their solution is to quit the church.

Paul had strong negative feelings toward Mark because Mark “had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work” (Acts 15:38). From Paul’s perspective, Mark was a deserter!

Add to the cause of the sharp contention the family relationship of Barnabas and Mark. Mark was Barnabas’ nephew. Furthermore, Barnabas seemed to have more patience than Paul had in personal relationships. “So Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus” (Acts 15:39). Can you imagine the questions the brethren on the Isle of Cyprus must have asked Barnabas: where is Paul? Why did he not come with you? Such questions would surely have been embarrassing to Barnabas.

Although Barnabas had demonstrated so many fine characteristics of a genuine Christian, he nonetheless was a human being who was involved in hypocritical action on one occasion. The Apostle Paul said that when Peter came to Antioch he would eat with the Gentiles, but when certain men came from James, Peter “withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision” or the Jews. Paul said that the rest of the Jewish Christians in Antioch “also

played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy” (Gal. 2:11-13, esp. vs. 13).

Since the “sharp contention” between Barnabas and Paul was over a matter of judgment, they could go their separate ways and still do a good work for the Lord. If the contention had involved a doctrinal matter, then the reaction and the action would have been different.

A doctrinal matter burdened the early church including the churches of Galatia. Instead of the Apostles and elders ignoring the problem in hope that it “would just go away,” they met in Jerusalem to receive instruction from the Holy Spirit relative to the spiritual state of Gentile Christians. On that occasion they sent a letter to the churches and the letter identified the false teachers as those who “have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls...to whom we gave no such commandment” (Acts 15:24).

Furthermore, Paul wrote the Galatian letter identifying the false teachers as perverters of the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). To the church at Rome the Apostle wrote, “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, **and avoid them**” (Rom. 16:17, emphasis mine, TH).

The inspired instruction would certainly apply to extremists in the church of our day— those on the radical right who have the audacity to bind as law where the Scriptures have not bound or those who would abuse general commands of God’s word with their own specific restrictions. Paul’s inspired directive to the church of Rome would also apply to those who have the audacity to loose what the Scriptures have bound relative to the plan of salvation, true worship, and the non-denominational identity of the church.

Paul’s inspired letter to Titus provides instruction as to the way the church is to react to a heretic, or “a divisive man.”

He said, “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful, being self-condemned (Tit. 3:10-11). The Heretic, or divisive man, “denotes one who causes division by a party spirit, factions” (Vine, “Heretical”).

Congregations have sometimes had their unity disrupted by one or a little group that were allowed to sow seeds of discord. Congregations have been divided by “theological termites” who sometimes work to get a church to resent and reject the authority of elders. Some congregations could have been spared the grief and heartache of division if religious radicals, who had the audacity to make laws in the realm of general commands, had been told they would not impose their opinions on the church. Or if those with an obvious liberal mindset who seek to make the church a denomination among denominations had been withstood and not permitted to divide the church with their liberal agenda.

The Ultimate Good From A “Sharp Contention”

Since the “sharp contention” between Barnabas and Paul was in a matter of judgment and not an issue of doctrine, one may observe good that eventually came from the disagreement. Whereas before the disagreement there was one team of workers, after the contention there were two teams of workers. When the contention between Barnabas and Paul “became so sharp that they parted from one another” (Acts 15:39), “Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus,” but “Paul chose Silas” and they went “through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches” (Acts 15:40-41).

Mark Was Worthy Of The Confidence

Barnabas demonstrated his willingness to put confidence in people. He trusted the Apostles to use properly the money

that he had received from some land he had sold (Acts 4:37). Barnabas believed in the genuine conversion of Saul and Barnabas convinced the church in Jerusalem that they could trust Paul although the “they [the disciples in Jerusalem] were all afraid of him” (Acts 9:26-27).

Barnabas again showed confidence in someone who had for a time failed. He wanted to give Mark the opportunity to prove himself a better man than he had been on the first journey of spreading the gospel. Mark proved worthy of the confidence in him that Barnabas had shown.

When the old battle-scarred warrior for Christ, the Apostle Paul, was nearing the end of his earthly sojourn, he wrote his last inspired epistle, 2 Timothy. The Apostle realized that the time of his “departure is at hand” (2 Tim. 4:6); he wanted to see “his son in the faith” so he said to Timothy, “Be diligent to come to me quickly” (2 Tim. 4:9). Paul also wanted to see Mark because Paul said to Timothy, “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11). Did Paul want to apologize to Mark for a lack of confidence Paul had shown when he and Barnabas had their “sharp contention”? Did Paul want to tell Mark that he appreciated the service Mark had given to the Lord Jesus and to encourage Mark to continue that good work? Carl Spain wrote,

John Mark (Acts 13:5), who had been an earlier disappointment to Paul (Acts 13:13; Acts 13:15; Acts 13:37ff), is now regarded by the Apostle as very useful to him in ministry. Mark had been in Rome before and had been associated with Paul there as indicated by earlier letters Paul had written from there during his

first imprisonment (Col. 4:10; Phil. 22).
His later experience in Rome is reflected
in the gospel according to Mark, which
we think of as the gospel to the Romans.
(156-57)

If one doubts that the confidence Barnabas had demonstrated and the confidence Paul later had shown in Mark was not deserved, then let him/her observe the author of the second book in the New Testament.

There is an old tradition that Mark wrote what Peter preached, but it is no tradition, but as seen in Mark's inspired account of the Life of Christ, Jesus of Nazareth is the suffering servant of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 53)

Mark's record of the Life of Christ begins with a quotation from Isaiah 40:3. Mark is full of action. Jesus "straightway" or immediately following His baptism and temptation came into Galilee "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14), teaching in the synagogues, casting out demons, healing the sick, and raising the dead.

Mark recorded what is usually identified as the "Great Commission" (Mark 16:15-16). How many people will be in heaven because they believed and obeyed the Lord's commands in the "Great Commission"?

Mark's record of Jesus' life, death and resurrection concludes with the profound words about the Lord Jesus, "So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19).

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CHAPTER 33

Beloved Barnabas: What Made This Man So Lovable?

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

It is always a joy supreme to appear on this good, great, and grand lectureship as I have been doing since the initial one in August of 1989. The first two in this series were on God's Providence and The Minor Prophets. Tom Warren and Garland Elkins were the directors of these two. B. J. Clarke and Wade Webster have been the able directors of this series since they resumed in 1995. Year by year, this has been one of the very best lectureships conducted by our brethren. Abounding gratitude is expressed to Wade Webster and the Southaven elders for this treasured invitation to speak on this current one and pen a chapter for the book. Wade is a master craftsman in putting together a great lectureship.

What a good and great man, Barnabas, we are to contemplate in these five days of a truly spiritual enrichment. Nearly all we know of this man is on the positive side. Only in Acts 15 and Galatians 2 do we see a less desirable portrait of this man. Yet even in his sharp contention with Paul relative to John Mark, we observe a man willing to give John Mark a second chance to make good as a faithful servant of the Lord. They were kin physically, but we cannot help but think that the spiritual kinship was uppermost in the mind of Barnabas.

Luke and Paul are the only writers of the New Testament who make mention of Barnabas.

My assignment deals with the winsome personality of beloved Barnabas, a beautiful saint of the most high God. Why was he so lovable? Nine portraits will be painted in answering this query.

Barnabas Was Lovable In The Names He Wore

Initially, he was Joses (KJV) and Joseph (ASV) (Acts 4:36-37). Joses means “He that pardons” while Joseph means, “May God add or increase.” He had a good name at birth and he added luster to it. The late and lamented B. C. Goodpasture was a master in biographical studies. In his masterpiece on Andrew, he stressed that Andrew had a good name at birth and added luster to it. This Levite, who became a member of the Lord’s church, did this with the name of Joses or Joseph. The apostles, who early admired this new convert gave him the surname of Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37; KJV). This name fit and stuck. After this he is uniformly called by this saintly surname. In precious perfection this name meant “son of consolation” or “son of exhortation.” There are many Josephs in the Bible but only one Barnabas. It was a wonderful, worthy name when first given him and he added much luster to it. He made that name famous and precious among early saints of the Most High God. Have we added luster to the name bequeathed us at birth? Have we added luster to the name given us at the new birth—Christian?

Barnabas Was Lovable In Generosity

After Acts 4:36-37 the name of Barnabas became a household word among saints far and wide. Brother Goodpasture spoke of him as being generous of hand, of

heart, and of judgment. Generosity was his saintly synonym in Acts 4:36-37 wherein we read,

And Joses, who by the apostles, was surnamed Barnabas (which is being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Other generous saints had done this in Acts 2:45 and Acts 4:32-35 but Barnabas is the first named one in this selfless service. Unlike Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, he did not sell, keep back part of the price and pretend they were giving the total amount (Acts 5:1-10). They were selfish: he was selfless. He possessed the means to help those in need and this he did in fine fashion. Among great givers in the Bible, and there were many, he ranks high on the list. The Godhead is generous. His saints on earth are to breathe this same delightful disposition.

He Was Lovable In His Recommendation Of Saul In Acts 9

This is his second mention in the book of Acts. Saul was converted in Acts 9 with accounts given also in Acts 22 and Acts 26. Damascus was the city of his conversion. From Galatians 1 we learn that he went into Arabia for a space of time and then back to Syrian Damascus. Threats there prompted his leaving Damascus and returning to Jerusalem. This is his first trip to Jerusalem subsequent to his conversion. He left Jerusalem in Acts 9:1-2 with destructive attitudes and actions toward the disciples of Jesus in this foreign city. He had gone to Damascus with the avowed intent of binding Syrian saints and bringing them back to Jerusalem for severe punishment. Seeing the Risen Redeemer on the Damascus Road changed all that. He obeyed the gospel and became an immediate proclaimer of the Christ. His arrival in Jerusalem

did not turn out as he anticipated. Luke records the cold reception he received in Jerusalem by stating, “And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him and believed not he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26).

Here lovable Barnabas went into admirable action in the defense of the rejected Saul. Luke wrote,

But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. (Acts 9:27-28)

This was a wonderful and worthy thing Barnabas did for Saul. All this speaks volumes of Barnabas. He possessed such a high reputation of integrity among the apostles and Jerusalem saints that a few well-chosen words from him allayed all fears of Saul and allowed Saul a good reception among the Jerusalem brethren. He paved the way for Saul to do in Jerusalem what he had done previously in Damascus, speaking boldly in the name of Christ disputing “against the Grecians” (Acts 9:29).

As far as the record is concerned, this was the beautiful beginning of bonding and blending of Saul and Barnabas into fervent fellowship and friendship that would last for years. It would last when they team together in Antioch, when they took Antiochian aid to Judaeian saints, through their first missionary journey, through the defense they made of truth in Acts 15:1-2, then in Jerusalem and up to the time the second tour is planned. Serious disagreement between Paul and Barnabas relative to John Mark will bring their long association to an end. It is not revealed whether they ever worked as a team again. They had so much to offer each other and be of great help to each other.

Barnabas Was Loveable In Character

Charity in character is seen in Acts 4:36-37 where he sold property and brought it to the apostles to be disbursed among the needy.

His character shines brightly in Acts 9 when a few chosen words from him paved the way for Saul's prompt acceptance among Jerusalem brethren. His Jerusalem peers had the highest respect for Barnabas. He possessed in abundance a sterling integrity.

Dependability is an essential of character. A deep degree of reliability abounded in Barnabas. The apostles at Jerusalem had the utmost respect for Barnabas. We read in Acts 11:22, "Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch." This is Syrian Antioch and was some three hundred miles to the north. Their confidence in Barnabas was not misplaced. Luke continued, "Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23).

Unfolded here is another tremendous trait of his character. He had not begun the Antiochian congregation. Others had done this by laying the foundation and building upon the same. Barnabas was not the type to be jealous of the good success by others. He witnessed God's amazing grace in action and found genuine gladness in what he observed. Something is drastically wrong with any person who rejoices only in what he has done and never in what others have accomplished for the Lord. This is the flaw found in far too many preachers. Brother Gus Nichols was one of my all-time heroes. I was often associated with him in gospel meetings, lectureships, and in writing hundreds of articles for his great paper, *Words of Truth*. He was as free of

jealously as any man I ever knew. Younger preachers often would tell him of their work for Christ. He listened with keen interest and rejoiced greatly with them. He was like Barnabas in this matter. Barnabas was a great encourager and so was the noble Nichols.

In Antioch, Barnabas began to do promptly what he did with such precious precision—exhorting (encouraging) the brethren “that with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23). He went to Antioch to help—not hinder—the Lord’s Cause. He did not go there to sow seeds of discord among brethren (Pro. 6:19). He went to sow gospel seed filled with eloquent exhortations. Troubled Syria today needs an army of men like Paul and Barnabas to preach Christ exhorting people to be obedient to the demands of Deity.

In Acts 11:24 we have the delightful depiction of this man’s sterling character. By inspiration Luke wrote that Barnabas “was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.” The Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are good in an absolute sense. Those who fear God and keep His commandments are good in a relative sense. No man is sinlessly perfect. Only Jesus lived with sinless perfection all His stay on planet Earth. Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit. He was full of Sacred Scripture. The fruit of the Spirit were evident in his lovely life (Gal. 5:22-23). He was a deeply spiritual person. He possessed a remarkable faith. His faith was comprehensive. He had faith in God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the truth, and his esteemed brethren in the Lord.

Thus, we are not surprised in the least to read that “much people was added unto the Lord” (Acts 11:24). Barnabas was not ashamed to stress gospel fundamentals. People listened intently to this man of God and turned to Jesus in gospel obedience. This constitutes gospel preaching

at its finest. The same was said earlier of John the Baptist. He preached and people followed Jesus (John 3:25-30). This is successful proclamation at its finest. We should preach at all times in such fashion that people may follow Jesus—not us.

More of his amazing character is observed when he realized his need of help as Antiochian work expanded. His wise heart thought of a young man he had befriended in earlier years—Saul of Tarsus. Saul had been working in his home area—Tarsus and Cilicia. Barnabas determined he would find this brilliant young man. He traveled one hundred or more miles in his search for Saul. The Greek construction here indicates that it was with some difficulty he found him. With persuasive words he encouraged Saul to come to Antioch and help with a rapidly growing church. Antioch, fourth most important city of the Roman Empire, was a ripe mission field. The fields of spiritual conquest were white unto harvest (Cf. John 4:35). Saul acquiesced and this powerful pair of preachers spent one year of fruitful activity in this Syrian metropolis. They taught much people. Barnabas and Saul were both present at Antioch when the name *Christian* began to be worn. Enemies did not coin the term. Disciples did not think it up on their own. The name came from God. It fulfilled Isaiah 62:2. Saul, an apostle, and Barnabas, a prophet, may have been the human channels through whom this noble name was bequeathed so beautifully. This name glorified God, honored Christ, pleased the Holy Spirit, and unified the disciples in the name worn.

Barnabas Was Lovable In The Benevolent Service He Rendered

While this dynamic duet worked in Antioch, Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem, came to Antioch and predicted

a world-wide famine soon to descend (Acts 11:27). It materialized in the days of Claudias Caesar, Roman Emperor from A. D. 41-54. This famine would hit Antioch of Syria as well as Judaea to the south. Quite likely, Barnabas had sowed the seeds of benevolence among these Syrian saints. We recall from Acts 4:36-37 that this excellent man was generous of heart and hand. No doubt some of this benevolent disposition rubbed off on Antiochian saints. Every man among them, according to his ability, determined to send relief to Judaeans brethren to their south by some three hundred miles (Acts 11:29). They determined and they followed through. Both Barnabas and Saul were men of the highest integrity. They were the logical ones to convey this generous contribution to Judaea. They took this contribution to the elders. This is the first mention of this term in the New Testament. More than likely this term referred to Jerusalem elders—not each set of elders scattered throughout all Judaea. Later in Galatians 1:22, Paul will say he “was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ.”

Antiochian brethren did not have to worry that Saul and Barnabas would dip their hands into this fund for personal usage. Barnabas and Saul were faithful men of God.

Barnabas Was Lovable As A Missionary

He had been doing mission work in Antioch. Subsequent to this, Saul and Barnabas would pioneer in the spread of the gospel among Gentiles in Acts 13-14. We know this as Paul’s first missionary journey.

In Acts 13:1 prophets and teachers at Antioch are listed by name. Barnabas heads the list and Saul is last in mention. But soon it will be Paul and Barnabas or Paul and his company.

The Holy Spirit told the Antiochian leadership that Barnabas and Saul are to be separated for an assigned work.

Several years ago, I visited a Sunday morning Bible Class. The teacher read Acts 13:3 and none of the subsequent verses. He asked the class, “Does anyone in class know why the Holy Spirit wanted Barnabas and Saul to separate from each other?” He was dead serious. I listened in total amazement that none of the regular members corrected him with the proper answer. I asked to be recognized and suggested reading the full context makes clear that Barnabas and Saul were to be separated from the Antiochian congregation—not from each other. They made the proposed trip together—not apart. When a verse, like this one, is taken out of its context, it becomes a mere pretext. The late and lamented Guy N. Woods often made this very observation.

John Mark had come from Jerusalem to Antioch with them in Acts 12:25. Now he accompanied them on this historic journey. Leaving Antioch and Syria they sailed to the island of Cyprus. Be it recalled that this was the home area to Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37). This gospel trio traveled this Mediterranean island from Salamis in the east to Paphos in the west. At Paphos, they met Sergius Paulus, a man of humility who hungered to hear the Word of the Lord, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Elymas, a sorcerer, sought to impede such, but Paul dealt severely with this enemy of Calvary (Acts 13:9-11). The deputy believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord (Acts 13:12). Though some doubt that he obeyed the gospel, Sir William Ramsey for one, I am not of this number. Why was there such a great desire to hear the truth and not obey it when it was delivered to him? His was an obedient belief for a surety.

From this point onward in this trip it is usually Paul and Barnabas or Paul and his company. Barnabas knew how to take second place and do it gracefully. There is no tinge of jealousy in this great man Barnabas. In this he was like John

the Baptist in John 3. The writer John never called him the Baptist as the synoptic scribes do, but this is the John he had in mind. Of the Messiah the Messianic Harbinger said Jesus must increase but he must decrease. We preachers need to learn well this lesson when it is time for other to take our places. John did it; Barnabas did it. We preachers can and must do the same.

From Cyprus, they turn northward to Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Their travel by sea covered about one hundred seventy miles. Asia Minor was a large land area covering about 156,000 square miles. It was about two-thirds the size of the state of Texas. Fourteen provinces composed it and all but four are mentioned in the New Testament (Jackson 16).

At Perga, John Mark turned back, returning to Jerusalem. No reason is given by Luke in this chapter. Later, we learn from Paul in Acts 15:36-42 that he felt like John Mark was unjustified in this decision. Had Paul and Barnabas done this, there would have been no evangelizing of this great are of Roman provinces.

In Asia Minor, they will evangelize such cities as Antioch of Pisidea, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. These gallant gospel pioneers encountered numerous dangers, even a stoning of Paul at Lystra. Barnabas was just as courageous throughout all this as was Paul. On the return trip, they confirmed the souls of the converts they had made, exhorting them (in this Barnabas excelled) to continue in the faith, and appointed elders in every congregation.

Sailing back to Antioch “they rehearsed all that God had done with them” (Acts 14:27). Note what they did not say, “Here is what WE have accomplished!” Converting and sanctifying power lay in the gospel—not in human hearts and hands.

Barnabas Was Loyal And Lovable In Defending Truth

On the first missionary journey when they were in Lystra, the people there decided these were gods in human flesh. Had the Lystrans worshipped Paul and Silas, such would have been an act of idolatry. In Acts 14:14-18, Barnabas and Paul resisted such in the strongest of language. It was an able defense of the proper One to worship—God.

While at Antioch of Syria there arose false teachers who wanted to rewrite Mark 16:16 to read, “He who is circumcised, keeps the law of Moses, believes and is baptized shall be saved.” They did not believe the power to save was in the gospel—but also in Mosaic mandates. Paul and Barnabas knew this was an egregious error and defended the truth against these errorists. It was decided that this matter should be taken before the apostles and elders. We learn from Galatians 2 that Paul, Barnabas surely implied, went up to Jerusalem by revelation. God told them to go and go they did. The two of them, plus Jerusalem apostles and elders, stood their ground and defended the truth against rank Judaism.

It is very disappointing a little later that both Peter and Barnabas had to be corrected by Paul in Galatians 2:11ff. These two were not standing their ground in Gentile/Jewish matters touching circumcision and keeping Mosaic mandates. Barnabas and Peter both knew better. They just did not do better in the matter at Antioch. This was the very city wherein Barnabas had defended the truth so courageously.

He Was Even Loveable To John Mark In The Controversy of Acts 15:36-41

In the latter part of Acts 15, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they make another trip to the places evangelized on their first journey to see how the brethren were faring (Acts 15:36).

Barnabas was willing but he determined that John Mark, his kinsman, should be taken with them (Acts 15:37). He desired to give John Mark a second chance to make good on this trip and not be a shirker. Paul strongly disagreed suggesting that John Mark quit them on that first journey and “went not with them to the work” (Acts 15:38). It led to a sharp contention between these two veterans of the faith who had been comrades in Christ and for Christ for so long and had done so much together. Neither side was willing to yield ground. Thus they separated with Barnabas and John Mark going to Cyprus and Paul and Silas into Asia Minor again and later on into Europe.

I feel strongly that this was a matter of judgment. Had the Lord told Barnabas not to take John Mark he would not have been taken. Furthermore, had the Lord told Paul to take John Mark, then John Mark would have been taken.

In this contention Barnabas could have said to Paul, Paul, do you recall in the past when Jerusalem brethren were wary of you, that I defended you when others were fearful of accepting you? Now I want to go the second mile with John Mark and give him another chance to make good.

But so far as we know, he said nothing like this to Paul.

It may well have been the case that both dispositions helped John Mark in his spiritual recovery—Barnabas for giving him that second chance and a real wake-up call from Paul to jolt him into the realization of what was wrong when he failed to go with them and finish what he began. Later John Mark will be fully restored to Paul as we see in Colossians 4 and especially in 2 Timothy 4:11 when Timothy is commanded to take Mark and bring him to Paul, for he, John Mark, is profitable in his ministry. We rejoice that he did come back stronger than ever.

Later, Paul will speak well of Barnabas in 1 Corinthians 9. This speaks well for both of them.

Let it be said to the credit of both men that neither one tried to kill the reputation of the other before the brotherhood as would often be the case currently. Neither ceased missionary activity. As the matter concluded, there were two teams—not one. Both Cyprus and Asian Minor were covered respectively by both teams.

Barnabas Was Lovable As A Helper Of Many

He helped the needy in Jerusalem in Acts 4:36-37. He helped Saul to be accepted as a bona fide believer in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-28). He helped immensely the Antiochian congregation in Acts 11. He helped Judaeans by joining Paul as conveyor of Antiochian aid to famished Judaea. He helped every place he and Paul visited on missionary journey number one. He helped Antiochian brethren in Acts 14:27 to see the fruits of their successful work among Gentiles. He helped them to see the wisdom in sending forth this missionary team in Acts 13:1ff. He helped brethren to see the freedom in the faith and liberty in the Lord against being enslaved again under the Mosaic yoke. He helped John Mark to make good. He, no doubt, helped his native island in the trip he and John Mark made after the separation from Paul. Luke is silent on this matter but benevolence and Barnabas were lovingly linked.

Barnabas has helped all of us by being generous of hand, heart, and in judgment. He has helped all of us in seeing the beauty of his character, the sterling nature of his reputation, the value in extending encouragement and the faithfulness and fervency in the many good works he did. The fragrance of his lovely life is sweet to the smell of all of us.

Conclusion

Barnabas was one of the best men about whom we read in the entirety of the Bible. In the forest of humanity he stands as a great cedar. Lives such as his remind all of us so vividly that we can make our lives sublime and in departing leave behind foundational footprints on the sands of time.

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Ladies' Classes

CHAPTER 34

Encouragers In The Home: Encouraging Christian Women As Wives And Mothers

Cindy Colley

An informal survey was recently taken of Christian women in our congregations about encouragement. The question was asked: “When you are encouraged by Christian sisters, how is that encouragement most often communicated?” Some mentioned cards received in the mail and others mentioned gifts or acts of kindness. Some noted books with encouraging messages. But the vast majority of women interviewed cited verbal encouragement as the most frequently received and most substantial form of encouragement. I am glad that I get to offer public verbal communication today to encourage faithful wives and mothers.

Of course, the scriptures are replete with encouragement for women who are faithfully fulfilling the all-encompassing roles of wife and mother in the home. Sarah was commended for her obedience to Abraham in First Peter chapter three. Jochebed was commended, though not named in Hebrews eleven, for the protection she provided for her son, Moses, which eventually played a large role in the deliverance of

Israel from Egyptian bondage. The Proverbs are sprinkled with passages about the wisdom of faithful women in the home. Proverbs 14:1 says that a “wise woman buildeth her house, but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands” (KJV). The virtuous woman of Proverbs thirty-one details the actions and the spirit of that woman who “builds her house.” Perhaps my favorite of the “wise-woman-encouragement” passages is the commendation John gives to the elect lady in II John, verse four when he rejoiced because her children were “walking in truth.” I have that verse cross-stitched and framed in my home next to pictures of my children. It is my prayer, of course, that they will always walk in truth.

It is with a great debt of gratitude that I present this lesson. Perhaps there were times, in the rearing of our children, that I would not have been able to persevere to put God in the hearts of my children in the face of extreme pressure from the world without the encouragement of godly women. Thus, this lesson is profoundly personal to me. I pray that it will be much more than a personal testimony, for I want this lesson to find its foundation in the Scriptures; yet, I believe, to be most practical, I must share with you the ways in which women of God in the last few decades have applied the Scriptures by encouraging the principles of Titus two in other women of the body of Christ. No discussion of encouragement in the home for Christian women would be complete without a look at Titus 2:3-5:

The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their

children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

I see no way that older women can teach the characteristics of Titus two without commending the development of them. Today, in this session then, my hat is off to the women in this room who are sober-thinking women.

Sober thinking women are clear thinkers. They are serious in their approach to spiritual matters. If you are conscientious about learning and applying the laws of God in your home, I applaud you today. If you study your Bible daily and pray for wisdom in applying it in your home, you are probably a sober-minded woman. If you are trying to reach others with the gospel and talking with your children daily about how you may be best able to help someone go to heaven, you are serious about the cause for which Jesus died. If you are placing worship before sports, family Bible time before television time and elevating the Lord (His Word) to the position of number one advisor in all areas of your life, then your children have a precious treasure that will become more and more precious through the years: a sober mother.

Today, I applaud those of you who love your husbands. Surely all of us love our husbands. Did you know that this word for love in Titus two is *phileo*—friendship love? That is right. We are to love our husbands with the kind of love that makes us the best of friends. We treat our friends as if we are interested in the things that they tell us. If we want to develop friendships, we look for common interests and then spend time exploring them together. We are aware that we will shut down friendships quickly if we are short-tempered or rude to others. Do we apply these common-sense friendship

principles in our homes? If you are a woman who says, “Yes, I do,” then may I give you a verbal pat on the back today?

Next, there are many mothers in the kingdom today who love their children. We live in a world in which love for children cannot be taken for granted. In America, over a million babies are aborted yearly. Many more suffer or die due to abuse and neglect. But women of God are intentional about loving their children. Not only do we not suppress the natural affection that God intended mothers to have for their children, but we make conscious decisions to place their interests above our own. We sacrifice whatever is necessary to show them that their souls are more important to us than any material possession or any personal pleasure this life affords. We love our children regardless of physical imperfections or spiritual ineptitude. We love them unconditionally.

Love is manifested by tender care, by time spent teaching and training, and it is shown in the difficult and demanding job of discipline. It is shown in our encouragement and praise and is even more evident in our punishment at the appropriate times (Pro. 13:24; Pro. 19:18).

Discretion is difficult in a society that has unleashed its carnal passions so publicly and so completely. But there are many of God’s women today who are consciously choosing daily to be women of discretion. When the world talks profanely, you speak with reverence about things that are holy. When the world clamors for cheap and vulgar entertainment, you are limiting or even getting rid of your cable channels and refusing to attend or allow your children to attend movies or concerts where immorality pervades the content. You do not speak loosely of sensitive matters in conversation or on your Facebook wall. Sex and bodily functions and flirtation with men other than your husband are not topics of your conversation. In short, you are women

of discretion, sound judgment, and controlled passions. Your husband, if he is a godly man, appreciates this wholesome reservation in your manner of living. May I encourage you as you glorify God by your discretion.

You are women of chastity. You are morally blameless. You are women of moral purity. The devil has done a subtle, yet thorough job of casting mockery on sexual purity through the media and the icons of our current society. Virginity is equated with homeliness or social ineptitude rather than with goodness. It is a state that is mocked rather than praised in our teen girls. Even church-going girls who would openly take moral stands against licentious activities like dancing, passionate kissing, or being entertained by sensual movies and songs are viewed as prudes, woefully behind the times, religious fanatics. Saddest of all, is that, often, girls and boys in our own congregations suffer isolation and exclusion if they stand for practical morality that fifty years ago was the distinguishing characteristic of Christians in our communities. But, today, there seem to be few distinguishing characteristics of Christians in many of our communities. And we are paying a premium price for the way we have melted into the moral depravity of our American environment.

Divorce is almost as common in the church as it is outside the church. Many congregations no longer ask questions of members coming into congregations in third or fourth marriages. Elders had rather look the other way than reckon with Matthew 19:9, a passage that even the disciples of the day found to be a difficult teaching of our Lord. In many places now, after thirty years of looking the other way when adulterous unions were occurring, it is becoming very difficult for those in the church to be taken seriously when they object to homosexual unions. After all,

both are fornication. There is a sense in which the question is legitimate: Why should one be offensive to us, when we have accepted and embraced, often even celebrated, the other? Our young generation is perceptive. They can easily see this inconsistency in congregations where it exists.

So, if you are a woman who is determined to preserve your God-approved marriage to one man for life...if you are determined to break whatever chains of divorce and adultery may have been forged in your family...if you are determined to put the sanctity of God-approved marriage in the hearts of your children and their children, may I encourage you? You have decided to stand against the current that rages through Hollywood, our legal system, and the current administration of our United States government. But tougher than standing against those entities is remaining strong in practical ways as you teach your sons and daughters how to dress, how to behave in the company of the opposite sex, how to explain lovingly their entertainment choices to those outside the body, and how to rejoice in the face of persecution or exclusion from friends (Luke 6:22). No mother who has done these things in our culture would ever tell you it is an easy proposition, especially as she raises kids through the teen years. But every Christian mother who has done these things will tell you it is worth every late night discussion, every early morning prayer, every attempt to find encouragers for your children, and every tear you have wiped from the faces of your children as they are growing stronger in conviction through difficult tests. Your value in your home and in your congregation cannot be overestimated.

You are good. That word *good* needs no explanation. Sometimes we hear a person make a blanket statement about a friend: "She is just a deeply good person." If that can be said about you, it is because you have been affected by the

Lord. It can be said about you if you are constantly striving to exemplify the other traits listed in this passage.

I hope that all of those who hear or read this lesson are obedient to their own husbands. In my experience, though, in speaking to women around the country, at marriage and family seminars, it would be rare for all of the women in any audience of appreciable size to be obedient women in this regard. Once again, our populace derides the concept of submission in the home...particularly in the direction of woman to man. It is very difficult, in the feministic culture into which we were born to conceptualize how good life can be if we decide, as partners in marriage, to do it God's way. Several things make it difficult. (All of these things, of course, are tied to a departure from God's Word in America today.) One is the prevalence of deadbeat men in our society. Fathers have failed for generations now to put leadership skills, compassion, and a good work ethic into their sons. Thus, most men do not know how to lead lovingly. Second is that mothers are failing to teach our daughters to be discerning in teen relationships and in choosing life's partner. Third is the feminism that tempts us at every turn in our society. It is very difficult, without a lot of hard work and diligent teaching at home, for our daughters to emerge from the teen years without having some of the "no-man-is-going-to-tell-me-what-to-do" mentality. It is a mindset that has a very strong hold in our culture and we easily become adherents without even knowing it. It is particularly difficult for our daughters to go through public schools without being affected by the materialistic and anti-Biblical thinking of feminism. All of these factors combined make you quite the stand-out if you are following the clear New Testament injunctions to be obedient to your husband (Eph. 5:24; Eph. 5:33; Col. 3:18). Your faith is hard at work in your life. God will bless you.

There is yet another injunction in these verses. Verse five instructs the older women to teach the younger women to be keepers at home. It is the hardest part of the passage for women in the church today. Whenever I try to encourage those women in our congregations who are choosing to be such, I encounter the ire of women who assume I am, by my commendation, being “judgmental” of women who leave their children in the care of others while pursuing careers. I cannot, in good conscience, encourage women who are diligently living the “good” life of Titus two in all of the other areas and fail to commend those who are sacrificially being what the Holy Spirit termed “keepers at home.”

Here is what the term *oikouros* (keeper at home) means according to Strong’s: “A stayer at home, i.e. domestically inclined (a “good housekeeper”).” May I commend you if you are dedicated to the job of being a keeper at home? If you are a woman (and I know many) who sacrifices daily for the privilege of being a “stayer at home,” may I offer you personal encouragement? I know you will receive rich rewards as a result. If you have worked to be sure that you are domestically inclined, you are to be commended. If you are a good housekeeper, the Lord looks upon your work as valuable.

Sometimes we just get in our own way. Sometimes we would just be so much better off as God’s women if we could just submit to His will, willingly and wholly, instead of trying to be His in name and yet play the world’s feministic game. We decided a few decades ago that we could do just as well chasing careers as we could chasing children. And so, by and large, our children got away from us. We are losing them to the world in huge numbers. We can recklessly blame lots of things: inept youth ministers, school influences, weak church leaders, television—a litany of evils. But really, the buck stops

at home. We cannot turn out Timothys if we have failed to be Loises and Eunices. If we fail to spend time with our kids, we cannot put the Word in them in the Deuteronomy 6 way. And if they do not get the Word in them according to Deuteronomy six, then why should we expect the result of Deuteronomy six teaching: that they should walk in the ways of the Lord all of the days of their lives? It really does not take a village to raise a child. In fact, I am convinced that it is our villages—the culture of materialism around us—that has most dangerously influenced our homes. It is the village to which we sometimes leave our children that draws them from God.

That is the ultimate price that we often pay for feminism. But there are other lesser prices, too. We wanted to find fulfillment outside the home forty years ago. So we left the challenging and very rewarding (and very Biblical) arena of raising our children, being keepers at home, and being helpers to our husbands for desk jobs and corporate partnerships, teaching positions, and medical careers. Some women traded the home-keeping business for not-so-lucrative positions as underlings to more successful men and women. But many, if not most, did so, not to put food on the table, but, instead, to take the family out to eat more often. They were not keeping a roof over their heads, but were rather making sure there was lots of square footage under that roof along with tasteful decorations, multiple bathrooms, and a well-stocked entertainment center. The casualties are sometimes the little people living in that very square footage we have worked so hard to provide.

But what are some of the other prices we pay (besides our inability to maximize the hours of faith-injection in our kids)? I have noticed several price tags in recent weeks. One is that the more we work outside the home, the more we are

expected to work outside the home. Case in point: Several young ministers applying for jobs in churches recently have told me that the elders were unwilling or unable to pay the young families enough to adequately support them, so they indicated that the young preachers' wives could "get a job to supply the rest of the needed income." Something is wrong with that picture. Have we really come to the point in our churches in which elders believe it is the minister's wife's responsibility to provide basic monetary support for the pulpits in our churches? That is not the idea, for sure, in 1 Corinthians 9.

Secondly, there are those men in some of our churches today who are fearful of implementing programs which facilitate our older women teaching our girls how to be keepers at home. The reasons being given include a fear that women will get the idea that we think they should be staying at home and raising their own children. Or perhaps women will resent the study....It might portray housework as not really being an "equally shared responsibility" in the home. Or perhaps women might feel denigrated if we emphasize domestic skills like sewing and cooking, cleaning, and ironing. Have we come to the point that Titus 2:3-5 is actually offensive to women in our pews today? Are some church leaders even afraid of the ire of feministic women in congregations? The phrase *keeper at home* is still there in Titus two and it still means "one who looks after the home; a domestic" (Strong). Is the Word so old-fashioned that we can prohibit its teachings in our churches?

Thirdly, I believe women in the workplace, many times, lose the precious commodity of a heart that hates sin. I have been amazed, recently, as I have learned of "Christian" women reading pornographic novels, being comfortable with vulgarity of language, dressing more and more immodestly,

even undergoing abortions, and freezing multiple fetuses fertilized in test tubes—babies that they produced, but never planned to raise. I hear of more and more of my sisters who have become involved in adultery and have even left their children for these relationships. There is a litany of sins of which we are becoming ever more accepting and tolerant. Now, do not get me wrong. I do not think women's jobs are always the culprit, or even the catalyst. But I know that in many of the cases with which I am personally familiar, the associations at the office or school or hospital, combined with little time for Bible study and prayer make for an easy exit from the narrow path to the broad way that leads to destruction. When we are around the world and away from the little innocent hearts that constantly remind us of a higher calling, it just becomes easy for us to lose the heavenward focus and be sucked into the mentality that pivots on the here and now. The more we say “yes” to promotions and career climbing, the less time we have for prayer and family devotions. Furthermore, if we do not have time to think about spiritual things, our consciences become less and less potent and we become more and more accepting of the world.

Did I say it is always wrong for any woman to work outside the home? No. Did I say there are no situations in which women can make supplemental incomes and still “be there” for family? No. Do I think every woman can possibly have the luxury to be at home with her kids every day? No. Does it even matter what I say? No.

But God's Word still calls us to be “keepers at home.” Whatever I am, I must be sure that I am that. But even aside from the clear statement in Titus two, I think I could figure out that there is often a big price for following a career path that takes me away from home and children. I am going to keep pointing this out because (1) I have known women who

figured this out in the nick of time and saved a lot of heartache, (2) I have known several women who figured this out when it was too late—eternally too late—for their children, (3) I have known several divorces which would most likely have not occurred had a woman chosen to stay home and raise her children and (4) I personally can attest to the fact that being a keeper at home is one of the most fulfilling and rewarding ventures of this life for God's women. I want to share the wealth.

I can hardly believe that we've come to the point in the body of God that the teaching we hate most, as women, is that we really should optimally stay home with our babies and raise them ourselves...for God. But we are there. May God help us to realize that the needs of babies have not changed in the last half-century. It is a deep and threatening desire to be like the culture around us that endangers our faithfulness and that of our children. May He help us to be transformed by a renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2) as we turn our hearts toward home.

In closing, may I suggest ten easy ways we as older women may encourage younger women who are committed to home and family:

1. Tell them you are proud of what they are doing. Find those women in your congregation who are doing life God's way and put your arms around them and praise them for the kind of homes they are keeping. May I emphasize, mothers, if you have an adult daughter who is seeking first the kingdom in her home, go today and tell her how proud you are of her. Others may tell her, but your praise as her mother is the most powerful encouragement she will receive in her life.

2. Bake a freezer casserole and bring it with a sweet note of encouragement to one of the worship services and give it to a faithful wife and mother.

3. Invite the children of one of the faithful families in the congregation over to pick flowers or bake cookies with you and take these sweet children to visit one or more of the elderly members with you. You can have a hand in helping to train these children to serve. A young mother will be very encouraged by your part in her children's lives.

4. Invite a child from a larger family to sit with you during worship. Be sure you are diligent in making sure the child behaves.

5. Go to those children in your congregation who may show up for worship in their ball uniforms. Put your arms around them and tell them how very proud you are that they chose to come to worship tonight instead of staying on the ball field. What an encouragement you will be to some young mother!

6. Invite some children over to your house next Mother's Day weekend to bake cookies or make aprons for their mothers as surprises for her special day.

7. Find books by faithful women about Christian marriage or parenting. Pen a sweet note inside and give them to women who can use encouragement in these areas.

8. Offer to keep children in a good family so that their parents can have a date night.

9. Approach your elders and ask them if you might teach younger women for a month or even for a quarter and study Sarah, Jochebed, the great woman of Shunem, Abigail, the woman of Proverbs 31, Mary (the mother of Jesus), Lois, Eunice, Priscilla, and the mother in the book of 3 John. What a study!

10. Mothers will love you for this one. Ask the elders if you can have their daughters for a quarter. Teach them in a class about chastity and discretion. Be sure you spend time with them outside of class doing fun things like shopping

for modest clothing, eating at their favorite restaurants, and baking cookies for the widows. You will be far more successful in your teaching if these girls get the idea that you really care about them.

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CHAPTER 35

Encouragers In The Nation: Encouraging Christian Women As Citizens

Grace Williams

Thank you, Wade for asking me, and thanks to the elders for allowing me to write this manuscript. The study has been of great value to me, and I pray that it will be a blessing to the readers of this book.

Introduction

“Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Pro. 14:34; KJV). For many years, the United States of America was considered a Godly nation. Our coins state “In God We Trust.” Our pledge of allegiance has the phrase *one nation under God*. However, these statements are quite contradictory to the lifestyles of many who inhabit this country in the twenty-first century. Flagrant sins such as dishonest gain, drug abuse, both legal and illegal, fornication of all types, murder which includes abortion, haters of God, and other sins are ravaging our country. Why have our people become so sinful and distanced themselves so far from God and the principles of our founding fathers? Why has our country changed from “one nation under God” to

a land that “knows not God (1 John 4:8)?” How can one be a good citizen of such a nation? In the following pages, we will explore examples of people from the Bible who exhibited an aberrant lifestyle and compare those to paradigms who demonstrated **the** Godly way of life. We will see what happened to individuals, churches, and nations that refused to follow the guidelines that God had delivered for their moral uprightness. Then we will make application to our own lives as we dwell among sinful mankind but profess loyalty to our homeland while, at the same time, acknowledging God as the supreme ruler of mankind.

Let us define the word *citizen*. According to Encarta Dictionary, a citizen is a “legal resident of a country, somebody who has the right to live in a country because he or she was born there or has been legally accepted as a permanent resident” (“Citizen”). A child of God holds citizenship in two realms—the physical and the spiritual—and must profess allegiance to both. How can one do that? Foremost in our minds should be the Word of God. Our very existence should portray Christianity at the supreme level. When we know God’s laws, we will have no difficulty establishing priorities in our commitment to our nation and to our heavenly Father. It is in Holy Writ that we learn how to be faithful to our country while maintaining loyalty to our God (Psa. 119:11; Rom. 13:1-7). Deciding which kingdom is more important has always been a problem for mankind. As we read through the Bible, we come upon many instances where people had difficulty trying to serve the physical and the spiritual equally, turning away from God altogether, or turning toward God and having to live in defiance of some of the laws that nations made which were contrary to the laws of heaven. Except for the nation of Israel, there has always been conflict between the two.

Examples Of Discouraging Behavior

The nation of Israel was a theocracy. God had made the laws for the earthly kingdom. Therefore, there was no conflict between obeying the laws of the land and abiding by God's statutes and judgments. The conflict arose when the Israelites thought that their ideas were better than God's prescribed approach to life and chose to live by their own standards. God had led them through the wilderness, given them the Law, shown them His protection, and guided them into a "land flowing with milk and honey" (Exo. 3:8; Exo. 3:17; Exo. 13:5; Jer. 32:22; Eze. 20:6). But when Joshua and all the elders who outlived Joshua died, what happened? Judges 2:10 tells us, "There arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel." How could this be? One only has to go back to Deuteronomy 6:6-12 to get an idea. God had commanded Moses to teach his statutes and laws to the Israelites **so that they could keep them**. Those instructions were to be ever before them. Wherever they went, whatever they did, they were to have those directives before them so that they would **remember** to be obedient to the great God who had made possible their escape from Egyptian slavery. He had provided a means for them to cross the Red Sea on dry land, brought water and food to them in the desert so that they would not die of famine, and protected them from enemy nations. Not only were they to be reminded continuously of God's laws, they were to **diligently** teach them to their children, using every opportunity as a "teachable moment." Somewhere along the way, people forgot what their duty to God and to mankind was. They forgot to **study**, to **learn**, and to **teach**. Therefore, the younger generation knew not God and His covenant with the people. He had chosen the nation of Israel to be a righteous nation, a nation where parents and

grandparents were supposed to be a light to their children and grandchildren, where neighbors should have been a model of morality to their community, and the neighborhood should have been a beam of decency to the rest of the world. But, because of sin, the kingdom of Israel declined into obscurity.

From the example of Israel, one can see that the weakening of that people started with individuals. Each person was responsible for learning the will of God and for teaching it to others. Each individual was accountable to God and made the choice of whether to learn and to live by the decrees of their Creator. As those who have studied the Bible know, many people decided to try another way. Judges 19 and 20 relate a story of a deviant lifestyle. The story describes a Levite and his concubine who were travelling in a far country and trying to return home. The Levite did not want to spend the night in the foreign land. He went to Gibeah, which was a city in Israel, hoping to find lodging. An old man found him and his servant sitting in the city square, took them to his home, fed them and the donkeys, and gave them a place to rest for the night. However, while they were relaxing and enjoying themselves after their meal, “perverted men” of the city came to the host’s door to get the Levite. They were not coming to welcome him to their city; they wanted to “know him carnally!” (Jud. 19:22; NKJV). The man of the house was appalled by the behavior of the men of the city and begged the intruders not to “commit this outrage” (Jud. 19:23), this “vile thing!” (Jud. 19:24). Leviticus 20:13 recorded the command from God that stated, “If a man lies with a male, as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.” The men who wanted to participate in this “vile thing” were residents of Israel. They were the people to whom God had given the Law of Moses—the Law

that had plainly stated that homosexuality was a gross sin against God and mankind. The word *abomination* was a strong word used to describe God's disgust with homosexual behavior (Strong). Mankind has an innate characteristic to know that men having sexual relations with men and women having sexual relationships with women is against the nature that God created in humans from the beginning (Rom. 1:26-27). If it were not the case, why would there have been the necessity for a male **and** a female? There would have been no point in God's telling Eve that her "desire shall be for your husband" (Gen. 3:16). Neither she nor Adam was to seek sexual fulfillment in any other situation. That was to be realized in the marriage relationship, a union between a man and a woman.

Even though the laws of the land for Israel had come from God, murder was a problem for the inhabitants of that nation. The story of Naboth being murdered by Jezebel can be found in 1 Kings 21. A good student of the Bible knows that Naboth owned a piece of land that bordered King Ahab's palace. The king wanted the land. Naboth would not sell it to him because it was his inheritance. Ahab went to his bedroom, lay down on his bed, and pouted. His wife, Jezebel, found him thus and asked what was wrong. He told her. Jezebel conspired against Naboth to have him killed so that Ahab could have the land. According to 2 Kings 9:26, she also had his sons killed. But that is not the end of the story of Jezebel. The account of her death as given in 2 Kings 9 is gruesome. Because of her wickedness, she was thrown from a window by some of her eunuchs and eaten by dogs. God decreed this would happen to her because He did not want her body to be buried so that someone could set up a tombstone over her grave and write, "Here lies Jezebel." Second Kings 9:37 states, "And the carcass of Jezebel shall be

as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel.”

The account of King David’s adultery and subsequent murder of Uriah is given in 2 Samuel, chapters 11 and 12. However, this is not the conclusion to the story. The consequences of King David’s sins were enormous. His household and kingdom were divided. He became a refugee from his own son. Many more innocent people were killed because of David’s wickedness. The sword would never depart from his house (2 Sam. 12:10). Even though David had committed such horrendous sins, he humbled himself before God when he was confronted with the knowledge that he had been unable to cover up his iniquities. What did David do? He acknowledged his evil and, with a contrite heart, asked for God’s forgiveness. Read Psalm 51 to see David’s plea with God that he be cleansed of his evil.

One has only to read through the Old Testament to find numerous descriptions of individual murders and mass slayings of people. Great calamities came upon the people who committed those atrocities against their fellow men. Although abortion is not mentioned as a murder, it is included. We need look no further than Exodus 21:22 which states, “If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman’s husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.” A right-thinking individual will conclude from this verse that the killing of an unborn child is murder, especially if the mother takes the child’s life or allows someone else to do so. Even in our age, doctors call a child in its mother’s womb a viable being. Why? Because that little baby is receiving its nourishment from its mother and is capable of growing to the maturity date of the pregnancy so that, with proper care,

it can live outside the mother's body and grow to adulthood. The child is a living being from the time of conception. Otherwise, there would be no point in performing an abortion to take it away from its source of life. The Scripture depicts a pregnant woman being injured accidentally so that she loses her child. The perpetrator was to be punished. What must the **deliberate** murder of an innocent, helpless, unborn child be to God! What will be the end of those who do not seek and find God's forgiveness for such deeds?

Churches That Tolerated Sin

All of the above mentioned turmoil occurred in a nation where God, not man, had made the laws. Even when the people chose a king, the king and his subjects were responsible for knowing and obeying the laws of God. However, imperfect, self-willed mankind walks this Earth. The temptations are painted with attractive colors to lure people into Satan's traps. God is perfect, and he gave mankind perfect rules to follow. Nevertheless, mankind is weak and is entirely capable of being ensnared by the Devil's devices. His choices do not always line up with the will of God. The account of the seven Churches of Asia is given in Revelation chapters two and three. The two examples used herein explain very well how people want what they believe to be the best of both the world and righteousness. The members of those Churches lived under the earthly authority of the Roman Empire, but they had accepted Christ as their spiritual king. They were a part of the Holy Nation, but some of them were tolerating worldliness among their ranks. Though the brethren at Pergamos were holding fast to the name of Christ and not denying their faith, even when some were being martyred, they were compromising with the world. They were accepting idolatry and fornication among some of their members

(Rev. 2:12-15). The church in Thyatira was charitable, faithful, patient, and performed other good works, but it had become very corrupt. While holding to their faith, patience, and charitable deeds, they were allowing idolatry, fornication, and a false prophetess to practice and to teach her philosophy among them (Rev. 2:18-20). This practice was totally unacceptable to God. He would not permit “fence-straddling” among the members of His body in the first century, and He will not permit it today!

Examples Of Encouraging Behavior

When we look to the Bible for answers, in addition to the examples of discouraging behavior that we have already discussed, we can find those who attempted to be good citizens of their countries while holding fast to God’s commandments. One that may not be readily thought of is Abigail, a wife of David. Before she was David’s wife, she was married to Nabal. You might remember that he was a wicked man. His story is found in 1 Samuel 25 where he is described as “churlish and evil in his doings” (1 Sam. 25:3). He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. He had more than enough supplies to sustain the lives of his numerous workers, for he was very rich. David sent ten of his servants to him asking for food for the company of men who were with him, but because he was a foolish man, Nabal refused to give David the necessary items. David needed the assistance because he had been a fugitive from Saul. Even though Saul was dead, David may still have feared those left behind in Saul’s kingdom. Therefore, he remained in the wilderness and was in need of aid. Previously, he and his men had protected Nabal, and David had instructed his servants to remind Nabal of that fact. The servants did as David had directed them. Nabal’s reaction to the message of David’s servants was, “Who is

David? And who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?" (1 Sam. 25:10-11).

One of Nabal's servants told his wife, Abigail, about the confrontation. Her response was totally the opposite of Nabal's because her character was completely the opposite of his. First Samuel 25:3 records that she was a woman of beautiful appearance and wisdom. She knew that when David heard about Nabal's refusal to provide sustenance for him and his servants, he would be very angry and attempt to take vengeance on Nabal. Therefore, Abigail prepared supplies for David and his men and sent her servants on before her while she rode on a donkey. When she saw David, she dismounted the donkey, fell on her face, and did obeisance to him. Their conversation that followed indicated that Abigail knew that David had been appointed by God to be the king of Israel. Her behavior showed that she intended to find favor with David and with God, and she was doing all she could to insure that she would be in good standing with both of them. David was grateful that Abigail had come. She assuaged his rage and kept him from killing many innocent people in the household of Nabal. She also, perhaps unknowingly, assured herself a place in David's kingdom.

When she told her husband about how she had aided David, Nabal's heart became like stone. After ten days had passed, "The LORD smote Nabal, that he died" (1 Sam. 25:38). When David heard that Nabal was dead, he sent his servants to propose to Abigail that she become his wife. She did not become angry over the fact that David did not come in person. She displayed a very humble attitude toward David's servants in that she bowed her face to the earth and

said, “Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord. And Abigail hasted, and arose, and rode upon an ass, with five damsels of hers that went after her; and she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife” (1 Sam. 25:41-42). Abigail hastened to abide by David’s wishes. Because of her humble, deferential attitude toward David and his servants, she became a queen in the nation of Israel.

When we look to the New Testament for examples of good citizens, we find that in Acts chapters four and five, Peter and the apostles were preaching Christ, healing the sick and maimed, and converting Jewish souls to Christianity. The high-ranking Jews did not appreciate their efforts, but because the lame man had been healed in chapter four, neither could they deny the message that Peter and John were preaching. The Sanhedrin did not want any more Christian converts in Jerusalem, so the council decided that they would severely “threaten them” that they stop preaching the saving gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:17). However, Peter and the apostles did not listen to the Sanhedrin. They believed that everyone needed to know what they knew about Jesus, so they continued to preach. In Acts 5:17-21, they were imprisoned because of their defiance of the Jewish council. An angel came and rescued them from the prison and told them to, “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20). Early in the morning, they went back to the temple and continued to teach the good news of Jesus Christ. In the meantime, the council had reconvened and sent officers to the prison to have Peter and the apostles brought before the Sanhedrin. When the officers arrived at the prison, they found it securely shut and the guards outside and on duty, but they did not find Peter and the apostles. The guards reported their findings to the high priest and his

entourage. When they heard that the apostles had returned to the temple to continue their teaching, the Jewish officials were very disturbed and wondered what the outcome would be. They had the apostles brought before them again and reminded them of their previous appearance and subsequent warnings. The apostles' reply was, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Then they boldly proceeded to tell the good news of Jesus to the Sanhedrin. Needless to say, the Sanhedrin was extremely troubled because of the message and wondered if Peter intended to bring the blood of Jesus upon them (Acts 5:28). The apostles were beaten for their refusal to stop preaching the saving message of Jesus. Their reaction to the beating was to go about "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41).

The Apostle Paul was another messenger of God who was severely persecuted for teaching and preaching about Jesus. Second Corinthians 11:23-28 gives an account of how Paul was treated mercilessly because he was determined to be obedient to God and to teach lost mankind how to be delivered from their sins. Acts 21:26-Acts 23:5 describes one of those incidents when Paul's preaching was in conflict with Jewish culture. On his third missionary journey, Paul decided to leave Ephesus and go to Jerusalem, a hostile environment for Christianity and those who taught that doctrine. Paul had gone to Jerusalem to observe the Day of Pentecost. He had gone through all the ritual cleansings necessary for him to enter the temple. He had been seen in Jerusalem with Trophimus, an Ephesian, and the Jews assumed that Paul had carried Trophimus into the temple with him. They caused a tumult in the city and had Paul arrested. As the Roman soldiers were leading Paul away, he **asked** to speak to the commander. Paul wanted to defend himself before the Jews. When he

had been given permission to speak, he began his defense by explaining in the Hebrew language his Jewish heritage. He described how, as he was on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians, he had seen Jesus. He explained how he was told by Jesus to go into the city where someone would give him further instructions. Paul told of Ananias coming to him and making clear that he needed to be baptized to have his sins purged. He also related that Ananias had made known to him that God would send him to the Gentiles to teach them the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Jews listened to Paul until he mentioned the Gentiles. Then they loudly demanded that he be taken away from the earth saying, “for it is not fit that he should live” (Acts 22:22). Without realizing that he was a Roman citizen, the commander decreed that Paul should be scourged. In order to protect himself from the beating, Paul then revealed his Roman citizenship. Because the commander of the Roman army wanted the Jews to give an explanation of their accusation against Paul, the next day he ordered the chief priest and their council to appear before him.

As Paul was making his case before the Sanhedrin, the high priest commanded that Paul be hit on the mouth. For some reason, Paul did not recognize the high priest. After he was struck, he called the priest a disrespectful name. When it was brought to his attention that he had shown great disrespect to the high priest, Paul apologized and quoted from Exodus 22:28 which says, “Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people” (Acts 23:5).

The final example of a good citizen is Jesus. Even though he was the Son of God, He lived on Earth as a human being. He was a Jew who was in subjection to the rule of the Roman Empire. Matthew 17:24-27 records the account of Jesus going to Capernaum with his disciples. There Peter was confronted

by the people who collected the temple tax. The temple tax was not required by the Roman government. It was a tax that was collected in accordance with the Law of Moses and was for the support of the temple (Exo. 30:16). The tax collectors asked Peter if Jesus paid the temple tax, perhaps because Jesus resided with Peter when He was in Capernaum. Peter, as head of the household, was the spokesman for his house (Henry). Jesus, therefore, asked Peter, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?" Peter answered, "From strangers." Jesus' response was, "Then the sons are free. Nevertheless, lest we offend them go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you" (Mat. 17:25-27; NKJV). Notice that Jesus told Peter to pay the tax so as not to offend the tax collectors. Since Jesus lived under the Law, he was meeting the requirements of the Law. However, He did not need to be ransomed or have atonement made for Him; He paid the tax so that the Jews would not be insulted.

Matthew 22:15-21 gives an account of Jesus being confronted by a group of Pharisees intending to ensnare Him in His speech. They thought they had found the perfect scenario when they decided to ask Him about paying taxes to the Roman government. However, Jesus knew that they were trying to trick Him and asked them to show Him a coin. When they produced the money, Jesus asked them whose picture was on it. The Pharisees answered that it was Caesar's. Jesus then told them to pay the taxes that Caesar required.

Jesus' death signifies His submission to the government of the land more than any other occurrence in His earthly life. He submitted Himself to be accused falsely by the Jews and arrested by the Romans. He was brutally beaten, spit

upon, slapped, and mocked. When Pilate could find nothing wrong with Jesus, he turned Him over to his soldiers who shamelessly continued to mock Him. They put a scarlet robe on Him, placed a crown of thorns on His head, put a reed in His right hand, and spat on Him again. After suffering the indignity of the mockings and beatings, the soldiers then lead Jesus away to an extremely cruel execution. Why did He suffer so at the hands of the Romans? He had access to more power than the Roman soldiers possessed. The major reason for His suffering was the salvation of sinful mankind. He lived on Earth in the form of human flesh under the authority of the Roman Empire. He had been accused by the Jews and sentenced to die by the hands of the Romans. Even though He could have called more than twelve legions of angels to save Himself, he submitted to the authority of the Roman government and died to save wicked humanity. His sacrifice was the only one that would wash away the sins of the human race (Matthew 26 and 27).

What About Americans?

With all of the confusion, turmoil, and idolatry that occurred in times past, why are we dismayed when havoc that is just as bad or worse occurs in nations where men have made the laws and rule over other men? We do not open many newspapers or turn on newscasts without seeing or hearing some type of ungodliness, whether it is the killing of one individual or mass murders, a high official such as the president endorsing “same sex marriage,” or other forms of depravity among political leaders of our country. What is the answer that will give us the courage we need to carry on in the face of the devastation and ruin that arises all about us every day? There is only one place to go to find the answer. That is the same Book that told us about the God who

created humankind and gave the principles that will keep him contented and free from sin and degradation if he will only follow those standards. Not only does the Bible give us a view of how the world has been since creation, it allows us to see the present state of mankind and to see what will be the end result of chosen lifestyles. Even though it was written thousands of years ago, the Bible has the only accurate advice for those who wish to follow God today.

We older Americans were privileged to be born into a country where God was revered and His precepts honored. However, our freedom to practice our faith and to express our belief in our Heavenly Father and His code of conduct is quickly eroding away. Laws are being made to allow men to marry men and women to wed women. The murder of an unborn child is a mother's legal right. Euthanasia is practiced and even promoted by some. Idolatry in many forms is prevalent among us, from the lowest positions in life to the highest. Could these conditions prevail because our churches are turning to their members for their creed? How are we in this day and age going to respond to the unrighteousness that prevails in our nation?

Conclusion

People who live in this world are continuously faced with choices. There are only two: Is it right or is it wrong? Whether or not we choose the right way depends on our knowledge of the Scriptures and our desire to uphold God's principles in our lives. The Bible gives numerous accounts of God, through His spokesmen, encouraging people to be "strong and of good courage." As the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, Moses urged them to have the confidence they needed to face their enemies and take the land God was giving them. He implored Joshua, as he was

taking the leadership role of that great nation, to “be strong and of good courage” (Deu. 31:6-7). In Joshua 1:7, Moses told him to be “strong and very courageous” to observe and to keep all the law. As Joshua was about to depart from this earth, he admonished the people of Israel to be “very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses” (Jos. 23:6). In David’s final instructions to his son Solomon, he said, “Only may the LORD give you wisdom and understanding, and give you charge concerning Israel, that you may keep the law of the LORD your God. Then you will prosper, if you take care to fulfill the statutes and judgments with which the LORD charged Moses concerning Israel. **Be strong and of good courage**; do not fear nor be dismayed” (1 Chr. 22:12-13; NKJV). In Psalm 27:14, we find the statement: “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.” A similar statement is found in Psalm 31:24.

How in this day and age are we going to find the necessary courage to cope with the problems that encumber us? The solution to the predicament of mankind is found in the Bible. Righteousness requires us to do as Paul instructed the Ephesians (Eph. 6:13-18). We are going to take unto ourselves the “whole armor of God” so that we “may be able to withstand in the evil day.” We will be able to resist the evils of this world with our “waist girded about with truth.” We will put on “the breastplate of righteousness” and prepare our feet to go forth to teach the “gospel of peace.” We will take up our “shield of faith” because it will protect us from the “fiery darts of the wicked one.” We will don the “the helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” We will pray always (1 The. 5:17), and we will watch “with all perseverance and supplication” (Eph. 6:18) for ourselves **and** for all other saints. We will do as Samuel told

the Israelites when they had decided they needed an earthly king to be their leader: “God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way” (1 Sam. 12:23). We will pray for our fellow man, both Christian and non-Christian, as well as our leaders, and we will be vigilant and watchful so that we are not ensnared by the traps of the devil. In addition to prayer, each Christian will be watchful when she goes to the polls, making sure that she votes for the candidates that will make the most righteous leaders, not the ones that promise to keep the money flowing into our pockets. Each individual will lay aside “the sin which doeth so easily beset us,” and “run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:1-2).

God did not promise us a bed of roses. He promised us hardship and persecution for living righteously (2 Tim. 3:12). But He did promise us His assistance in navigating through this life. The peace that He promised is not necessarily freedom from strife, but the assurance that we can live with Him in eternity if we keep our eyes focused on Jesus Christ and are obedient to His commandments.

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CHAPTER 36

Encouragers In The Local Congregation: Encouraging Christian Women As Sisters In Christ

Jennifer Webster

Even the sound of the word *sister* is heartwarming and comforting with its soothing Sss (La Force). It evokes an idea of connection and encouragement that made stories like *Little Women* one of the most-loved books of all time. In the book, Jo declares, “I could never love anyone as I love my sisters” (Quotegeek). How many of us remember reading about the antics of literary sisters Ramona and Beezus? The relationship portrayed in these books is referred to as “sisterhood,” and we all yearn to be a part of something like that! No doubt, that is why the term *sister* is often used to describe things that are very close such as sister universities, sister cities, sister congregations, and, in biology, sister cells!

So far, I have painted a pretty simple and sweet picture of sisterhood. However, as you likely know, sister relationships are far more complicated than this. Someone has said, “Loving a sister can be a bit like hugging a cat...warm and fuzzy and fraught with peril” (Medwick). Few relationships in life can be as heart-warming or as heart-breaking as the relationship that sisters share.

Do you remember some of the things you and your sister said to each other growing up? Likely, some of these things are etched in your memory. Some are good, and some are bad. Some you have tried to erase, and some you hope you never forget. There certainly must have been at least a few instances when you argued or disagreed! Many experts acknowledge and I firmly believe that socialization occurs first and foremost in the home. You can learn nearly all you need to know in order to function in society simply by interacting with your siblings. Having a sister taught you many things...in some cases, it might have been simply how you ought NOT to act, but an important lesson was learned nonetheless! Let us recall some of these lessons and use them to talk about the relationship that we share as sisters in God's family.

Do Not Monopolize The Bathroom

No doubt, if you have a sister, you have probably fought over the use of the bathroom. Someone has said, "If you can share a bathroom, you can share anything!"

A selfish sister thinks the world revolves around her! She thinks she is always right; she thinks that her way is THE way of doing things. She has to be the center of attention, and she does not worry about how things affect other people. She does not care if you do not get your hair fixed, your makeup done, or your teeth brushed! She is not concerned with the fact that you are running late for school or for an appointment.

The selfish sister mentioned above reminds me of the twelve disciples. The relationship that these brethren shared with one another was very close to the relationship that siblings share in the home. Of course, it was parallel to the relationship that sisters in Christ share with one another. As

you know, the disciples practically lived together during the three-and-a-half years of Jesus' personal ministry. Day in and day out they were together. Sometimes their selfishness and pettiness came out. In the twenty-second chapter of Luke, we read about one of those times. On this occasion, they were arguing over who was going to be the greatest (Luke 22:24; KJV). Of course, each of the disciples thought that he was the most qualified to fill this slot. Jesus rebuked them for acting like unbelievers and reminded them that they were not supposed to be this way (Luke 14:26).

In addition to declaring unselfishness to the disciples, Jesus demonstrated it. In John 13, He took a towel and a basin and washed the dirty feet of the disciples! In John 13:14 He said, "If I then, Your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." If Jesus was willing to humble Himself, how much more ought we to be willing to serve each other?

As Christians, we are not supposed to think just about ourselves. We are supposed to think about others and esteem them better than ourselves. We are supposed to have the mind of Christ and serve one another (Phi. 2:3-8). Christ is to have the preeminence (Col. 1:18; 3 John 9).

The sister that does not serve her fellow Christian is just like the physical sister that hogs the bathroom. We cannot fall prey to the worldly mindset of "me first." We are supposed to go the second mile (Mat. 5:40-42) and treat others the way that we want to be treated (Mat. 7:12).

I am thankful to know of women who will drop everything just to serve you when you are in need. They will drive miles out of the way even with gas prices as high as they are to make sure your child is picked up for a church event when you are unable to transport him yourself. I have seen women who were on a strict budget divide their dinner

in half so that they could share it with someone who had experienced a death in the family or a sister who had just undergone surgery. I have witnessed women whose own children were in need of items of clothing generously give other mothers hand-me-downs. As women, we are all busy, but I repeatedly see those who give of their precious time to send cards, make visits and phone calls, or whatever else they can do to serve another.

One of my favorite memories is that of the day after my twins came home from the hospital. My husband and I were overwhelmed and sleep deprived. Not only did we have newborn twins, but we also had a three-year-old boy! That morning I answered the doorbell to find four of the women from our congregation standing there smiling at me. These women came in and cleaned house, changed diapers, rocked babies, took our son on walks, cooked meals, drove me to doctor's appointments and even came with their husbands on the weekend to help me care for the children while Wade was busy working on his sermons for Sunday. They did not do this for one day or even one week. Four months later, they were still in and out of my home. I feel indebted to them still today!

Is there anything more encouraging than a selfless, faithful, serving sister in Christ? How many times have you been deeply discouraged only to have that special sister say just the right words or do just that which is needed to lift you out of your despair?

Stay On Your Side Of The Room

How many of us had our fill of our sisters invading our space when we were growing up? Did you ever try to divide your bedroom into separate sides? I have heard about many creative ways that sisters have divided a shared room, but my

favorite was by the use of stuffed snakes! Whatever works, I guess!

Someone has said, “If your sister is in a tearing hurry and won’t catch your eye...she’s wearing your best sweater” (Brown). Was there anything more infuriating than that invasion of privacy by your sister? I well remember talking to my boyfriend or best friend on the phone only to hear at some point in the conversation a quiet laugh and realizing it was not the person I was talking to...it was my little brother listening in on the other line!

As women, yet another of our strong qualities is that of compassion. If there is a crisis, we are on top of it. If there is a sickness or death in the congregation, we will be there. If there is a sacrifice to be made, chances are, we will rise to the occasion and find a way to do what needs to be done. Where would the church be without faithful and active sisters in Christ serving one another? There is a difference though, in helping a sister and in meddling! Sometimes we, as sisters in Christ, barge into a sibling’s room without knocking!

The wise man Solomon noted that it was a characteristic of fools to meddle (Pro. 20:3). Those who are wise do not do it. We like to help, but we need to have the wisdom to know when not to get involved in a dispute or a problem that does not involve us. In the twenty-sixth chapter of Proverbs, Solomon wrote, “He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears” (Pro. 26:17). Surely, all of us can see Solomon’s point.

I realize that we sometimes get involved out of a sincere desire to help another. How do we determine the difference between helping and meddling? Perhaps the following questions can help:

- Did she ask for help, advice, or an opinion?
- Even if the person has broadcast a request for help or advice, did she ask for MY advice? When someone is drowning, they will accept a life preserver thrown by a stranger, but advice is only appreciated if the asker fully trusts and respects the advisor.
- Do I fully respect the other person? While I can responsibly make decisions for a child or senile person, it is pure meddling for me to believe that I know better than another competent adult how they should live their lives! (Huie)

If we can sincerely answer all the above questions with a YES, then it is helping and not meddling. If we answer any of the questions with a NO, it is meddling, and we should stay out of it.

Have you ever had someone make a comment about how many children you should have? Have you ever had someone question how you are educating your children? These are personal matters. It is my business and my burden to bear when it comes to how I will direct my family!

Sadly, some people are pot stirrers. Pot stirrers like to keep things stirred up. In Solomon's day, pot stirrers were called "scorners." Although they were known by a different name, the trouble that they caused was the same. Concerning pot stirrers or scorners, Solomon wrote, "Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease" (Pro. 22:10). Again, he wrote, "Where no wood

is, there the fire goeth out : so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth” (Pro. 26:20). This past ball season I made what I thought was a new friend, a new person to influence... until the evening we were sitting together during one of our children’s ballgames, and we began to talk about the church. She bragged about the fact that she was a “pot stirrer” and then she proved it by much of what she said. I was sure to sit on the other side of the dugout for the next ballgame!

We have your business and my business, and we have no business discouraging one another by meddling in that. However, it must be noted that there is God’s business. Sometimes we want to lump all advice or helpful suggestions into the category of meddling simply because we do not like being corrected or told what to do. We must get involved when God tells us to (Gal. 6:1). We encourage our sisters by correcting them when they are wrong!

Nobody Likes A Tattletale

For some people, it is a nail against the chalkboard. For others, it might be hearing a faucet dripping or someone chewing loudly. Personally, the thing that annoys me most is to hear siblings bicker and tattletale! It can be one of the most difficult parts of parenthood. It is tough to teach siblings how to handle conflict without running to tell a parent or some other person.

Usually, as children grow, they stop tattling. However, some carry a form of it right into adulthood. If your sister has a problem with you but does not know how to handle it correctly, she might use a passive aggressive style of dealing with the issue. She might give you the cold shoulder or silent treatment. She might give you a look that could kill you! You might be excluded from her circle of friends. She might avoid talking to you about a problem but be sure to tell others all

about what you did or said. It seems that this is an area where many women struggle!

Dealing with an issue that you might have with a sister like this is useless. The issue rarely gets resolved because the sister with whom you have the issue may be clueless that she is doing anything wrong. Whatever is going on may be her fault, but you cannot blame her forever if she does not even know you are upset. You are not giving her a chance to mend her ways. You are showing a great deal of love for another person by offering them the chance to hear what you have to say and respond.

How should we deal with issues and problems we have with one another? Directly! Luke 17:3-5 says, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him." Someone has wronged you? Tell HER. Nathan rebuked David and said, "YOU are the man" (2 Sam. 12:7; NKJV). He did not go to someone else and tell them what David had done.

Matthew 18:15-17 is the pattern for how we are to deal with problems in the church. We are to go and tell our sister her fault alone (Mat. 18:15). We are not to go up and down as a talebearer among the people (Lev. 19:16). If our sister hears us and repents, the matter stops there. No one else ever has to know. Her sins, even if they are many, can be hidden in love (Jam. 5:19-20). However, if she refuses to hear us, then we are forced to take the next Scriptural step and involve others. Still, we are not free to talk to everyone and anyone about the matter. We are only authorized to take a sister or two with us so that every word may be established (Mat. 18:16). If the sister repents, then her sin should never be known outside of that small circle. However, if she still refuses to repent, then the matter must be made known to the church (Mat. 18:17).

It is simply not Biblical to deal with issues indirectly. If we follow Matthew 18 in order to resolve problems with

others, we will be less resentful of one another and our relationships will be clearer. Generally, there are two sides to a story, and chances are, there is simply a misunderstanding that can be cleared up. The person you have an issue with may have a legitimate excuse or she may even have a problem of her own.

Do Not Be A Crybaby

Have your parents ever said to you, or have you ever made the comment to your kids, “If you don’t stop crying, I am going to give you something to cry about!”? This probably is not something that James Dobson would recommend saying, but the idea behind it is not bad! We have all seen children who cry to manipulate those around them. Some little girls cry because they do not get their way, they do not get something they wanted at the store, or their feelings were hurt because they lost at a game. Every little stubbed toe, slightly scraped knee, or frustrating moment elicits tears from some children. If a sibling takes a toy away or a sister gets a bigger scoop of ice cream, some children cry in order to get a parent involved. Some parents rush to make things right, all to the detriment of their child’s emotional development. What about the sister who gets hurt in a game outside, runs across the yard to tell mom, and actually does not start crying until the parent opens the door? That child has learned how to work the system! What do kids call children like that? Crybabies! A “crybaby” is a child that cries over every perceived slight or unfair action.

I remember an incident that happened with my twin girls when they were about five years old. They were playing with dollhouse people, and Emma wanted the baby that Claire had. She put her head down on her arms and pretended to cry. Claire quickly handed over the baby, but when Emma

started to play with it, Claire made a sad face and immediately put her head down the same way Emma had just done and pretended to cry!

If you do not curb the crying in your household and teach your daughter to control her emotions and be less sensitive about trivial matters, you will have a teenage girl who attempts to manipulate her parents and siblings through her tears. You might raise a girl to be a woman who wreaks emotional havoc with her sisters in Christ!

If there is one thing we women usually have in common, it is our sensitive natures. Along with this positive character trait sometimes comes a tendency to internalize and impute motive and meaning to the actions and behaviors of other people. Some sisters can put the worst construction on things, from decisions made by the elders to comments made by a sister in Christ. She takes offense when no offense was intended.

Someone has said, «If I do not give others the benefit of the doubt, but put the worst construction instead of the best on what was said or done, then I know nothing of Calvary love.» This is certainly true.

Do you remember the story of Naaman? In 2 Kings 5, we read about a very important man who had leprosy. His name was Naaman and he was the captain of the host of Syria. As you remember, he wanted to be healed of his disease. When he arrived at Elisha's house, the prophet did not come out to him. Instead, he sent out a servant with simple instructions for Naaman to follow: He was to go and wash in the Jordan River seven times. Naaman was furious! He took offense at the messenger and the message. It was not a big deal that Elisha did not come out and talk to him. Elisha was not trying to hurt Naaman. Naaman just had a preconceived idea about how things ought to be done. If it had not been for

some of Naaman's servants that convinced him to get over it, he might have missed the opportunity to be healed. If we allow someone to offend us easily, we might hurt the precious relationship that we have with a sister in Christ.

Here is an idea: Next time something happens that bothers you, consider for a moment that it may not have anything to do with you personally! Suppose, for example, that there is a woman in the congregation that appears barely to acknowledge you. She just seems to look right through you. You begin to think, "What is her problem? Why doesn't she like me?" You might even start to get angry, since it is obvious that she thinks she is too good for you. But have you considered other possibilities? Perhaps she is preoccupied with a serious problem in her life. Maybe she is in a huge hurry because she is tending to a sick child or parent. Perhaps she is shy. Maybe she is thinking the same thing about you! Maybe, just maybe, it is not personal!

Taking things personally only leaves you frustrated and discouraged, while leaving some people baffled by your reactions. When you allow yourself to be too sensitive, you are attaching your self-worth to another person's apparent motives. We need to get in the habit of stepping back from these situations a bit. We need to break the habit we have of overreacting because of our speedy assumptions and judgments. Next time you catch yourself wondering, "What did she mean by that?" remember that it may not be personal.

**If You Do Not Have Something Nice To Say,
Do Not Say Anything At All!**

Sisters who cannot speak peaceably about one another or to one another, strike a blow at the very heart of sisterhood. Name-calling, insults, and talking about your sister can ruin what could otherwise be a beautiful sister relationship.

The book of Genesis reveals just how ugly things can become between siblings. Joseph's brothers reached a point to where "they hated him" and "could not speak peaceably unto him" (Gen. 37:4). With each passing day, their hatred of him escalated (Gen. 37:5; Gen. 37:8). They plotted against him, talked about him, and called him names (Gen. 37:18-20). Had it not been for Reuben's intervention, a dry pit, and some Midianite merchants, they might have repeated the actions of Cain against his brother (Gen. 4).

Have any of you ever wanted to murder your sister? Have any of you ever wanted to give her way? Please notice that I said give and not sell. Let us be honest—no one was ever going to buy her. Even if these emotions never entered your heart, there were probably some times when your words were not peaceful. There were likely some times when you called her names and talked about her. You see, it is easy for us to be hard on Joseph's brethren. However, if it were not for the grace of God, we might have ended up in the same place.

If you have ever been the victim of angry words and evil conspiracy like Joseph, you know first-hand how important it is to put forth a great deal of effort to refrain from this sinful behavior. I believe that we, as sisters in Christ, have a particularly hard time with gossip. It has been said that women speak about 25,000 words a day, and men speak about 15,000 words a day! Women tend to be more conversational, more relational, and we sometimes build a false sense of camaraderie by gossiping. Sometimes we are so desperate for close, intimate friendship with other women that we will grasp for anything that we might have in common. The one thing that might bind us is a dislike for another sister in Christ! We need to realize that gossip is not

simply something we do because we are women. It is a sin. It is wrong to put our sister down in order to elevate ourselves. Someone has written the following lines to remind us not to talk about each other:

There's so much good in the worst of us,
And so much bad in the best of us,
That it hardly becomes any of us
To talk about the rest of us!

The Bible has much to say about the sin of gossip. James 3 talks about the tongue and how difficult it can be to tame it. Even though the tongue is small, it is powerful. It is like the helm of a ship or the bit in a horse's mouth. Properly used, the tongue can teach or encourage. However, if it is not controlled, it can be as destructive as fire and as deadly as poison. A mature woman will control her tongue and use it for good.

We have often justified our gossip by beginning with the phrase *Bless her heart* or *I'm really concerned about*. We may very well mean for someone to be blessed or we might have a genuine concern for someone, but we should THINK before we speak! Before you say something, ask yourself the questions from the following acrostic:

- T-Is it TRUE?
- H-Is it HELPFUL?
- I-Is it INSPIRING?
- N-Is it NECESSARY?
- K-Is it KIND?

If we cannot answer yes to all of these questions, then we do not need to say it.

Forget About What Happened When We Were Five

Once when I was about 6 years old, I noticed my much older and much bigger older brother lying on the floor on his back watching television. I went to my bedroom and engaged the lock on the door so that when I slammed it, it would already be locked. Then, I took a pair of heavy metal scissors, crept up behind him, and knocked him in the head with the handle of the scissors. I took off running down the hall to my bedroom and shut the locked door, just as he reached the threshold. It was a close call, and I still think of it sometimes when my own children bicker.

Why did I do that? And why do I still remember it decades later? It probably has something to do with whatever happened to me when I decided it was safe to come out of my room! Think about some of the immature things sisters do to one another. They fight over who gets to choose what movie they watch. They argue about who sits in the front seat of the car. They steal clothing from one another and harass each other about the boys they like. They make fun of new haircuts, and the younger ones get locked out of the bedroom during slumber parties.

First Corinthians 3:1-3 talks about how immature the Corinthian church was: “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envyings, strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”

The paraphrase is this: I had to talk to you like someone who did not have any knowledge of spiritual things because you were so worldly! I fed you milk (basic stuff) and not meat (deeper spiritual lessons) because you could not handle it.

Why? Because you are worldly and immature, and it shows by the way you treat one another.

Only little kids act like this, right? Women would never exclude others, fight over decisions that need to be made, argue about who is right, or put one another down, would they? The truth is that some little girls never outgrow their childhoods. It goes from the childish behavior we laugh about or often overlook in little girls to the mean girls in high school to the harsh women we sometimes find in society, and sadly, that we occasionally see in the church.

Colossians 3 talks about how we ought to act after becoming Christians. We are to put off certain things like anger, wrath, bitterness, and filthy talk (Col. 3:8), and we are to put on certain things like mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (Col. 3:12). The thirteenth verse even instructs us to forbear and forgive one another. In other words, there is to be no more childish behavior!

Hebrews 5:12 teaches us that there is a time when we ought to grow to a point where we can teach another person. There is also a time when we ought to grow to a point where we can be mature about disagreements with a sister, problems in our congregations, and other spiritual matters.

It is okay to think as a child and talk as a child when we are children. It is not okay to do so when we are adults. To the saints at Corinth, Paul wrote, “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13:11). I know that this verse is talking about spiritual gifts passing away when the complete will of God was given. However, this verse is founded on the fact that as children grow, they put away childish things. They grow to where they are mature, and they do not say the things to each other that they used to say or do to each other the things that they used to do.

Getting along with a sister in Christ is not all that different from getting along with a physical sister, is it? Both take a great deal of understanding and work. Let us continue to work on our relationships with each other as sisters in Christ. After all, we are going to live together forever.

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CHAPTER 37

Encouragers In The Community: Encouraging Christian Women As Personal Workers

Wade Webster

I am convinced that we do not have enough lessons on the subject of evangelism. We simply cannot follow closer to Christ than when we go out to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10; KJV). It was His work, and it must be ours (Luke 2:49; John 9:4). Not only have we neglected to preach as often as we should on the subject of evangelism, we have also failed to address as many lessons as we should to sisters in Christ. In this lesson, I hope to highlight the role that Christian women can play in winning the world for Christ.

The Commission

Before ascending back to His Father, Jesus gave the Great Commission to His apostles. Matthew records, “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen”

(Matt. 28:18-20). Although the command to go into all the world with the gospel was spoken to the apostles, the early Christians understood that it was meant for them as well. Luke, the sacred historian, recorded that the early Christians who had been scattered abroad by persecution “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). Clearly, along with the apostles, the early Christians were carrying out the Great Commission. They were carrying the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, and from Judea to Samaria, and from Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). In fact, some of these early Christians got to areas before the apostles did. For example, Philip arrived in Samaria before Peter and John. Luke records, “Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:14-17). Philip beat Peter and John down to Samaria. However, if you know the history of Samaria, then you know that Samaria first heard about the Savior from a woman. No doubt, you remember the story of the woman at the well who talked with Jesus about the living water (John 4). When this woman became convinced that Jesus was the Christ, she “left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come see a man, which told me all things that ever I did” (John 4:28-29). As a result of this woman’s personal work, many came to Jesus. John records, “And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did” (John 4:39). The fertile ground that Philip found in Samaria had been made ready by the work of the

Samaritan woman. I am convinced that many times today the fertile fields that I find as a brother in Christ have been made ready by a sister in Christ.

Of course, the Samaritan woman was not the only woman to spread the good news of Christ. Other women did as well. I have always found it interesting that it was women—“Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women”—who delivered the first report of the empty tomb to the apostles (Luke 24:1-12; Matt. 28:1-11). As you likely recall, women were the last ones at the cross (John 19:25-27; cf. Luke 23:27-28; Luke 23:48-49; Mark 15:40-41) and the first ones at the tomb (Luke 24:10; Luke 24: 22; Luke 24: 24; cf. Luke 23:55). These women were specifically commissioned by an angel (Matt. 28:5-7) and then by the risen Lord Himself (Matt. 28:9-10) to deliver the good news. No doubt, they had many occasions down through the years to defend what they saw on that wonderful morning (1 Pet. 3:15).

In addition to the woman at the well and the women at the tomb, other women greatly aided in the spread of the gospel and the growth of the early church (Acts 9:36-41; Acts 16:14-15). Just think of all of the women that “labored with” Paul “in the gospel” (Phi. 4:3). As you likely know, Paul is sometimes accused by feminists of hating women. However, this charge could not be further from the truth. After all, Paul often commended the women who worked with him and praised their contributions to his work. For example, in the sixteenth chapter of Romans, Paul mentioned a number of sisters by name. First, he mentioned Phebe, his sister and theirs, and described her as “a servant of the church” at Cencrea (Rom. 16:1). They were instructed to help her as she had helped others, including him (Rom. 16:2). Following Phebe, Paul mentioned a woman named Priscilla, and her

husband Aquila (Rom. 16:3). He described both of them as his “helpers in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 16:3) and spoke of how they had put their lives on the line for him (Rom. 16:4). Next, Paul mentioned Mary and spoke of how she had “bestowed much labor” on him and his companions (Rom. 16:6). He further talked of Tryphena and Tryphosa, who were probably twin sisters, who labored closely together with him in the Lord (Rom. 16:12). Finally, he mentioned Persis, evidently an elderly sister, who “labored much” with him in the Lord (Rom. 16:12). Although other women are mentioned in this chapter, these are the women whose contributions earned commendation from the apostle Paul.”

The Challenge

The United States Census Bureau estimates that there are 316 million people in the U.S. There are 7.092 billion people on the earth (U. S. Census Bureau). Perhaps the most staggering fact of all to consider is that these numbers are still going up. The population of the world is presently growing by 83 million per year (“WikiAnswers”) Clearly we have our work cut out for us. We need every hand on deck. If the gospel is going to go to the whole world, we need every woman and every man involved in the process. Since there are generally more women than men in our congregations, it is especially important that we enlist the largest part of our workforce.

The challenge that we face is not new. It is the same challenge that Jesus and His apostles faced. On one occasion, Jesus instructed the apostles to “pray for laborers” (Matt.9:38), because the “harvest was plenteous,” but the laborers were few (Matt. 9:37). That clearly sums up our situation too, does it not? We have a plenteous harvest—over 7 billion souls—but the laborers are few. The best numbers that I could find

list the total membership of the Lord's church at five million (Teske). Five million to reach seven billion. Truly, the harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Like the apostles, we need to be praying for laborers to help us to gather in the grain that is white unto harvest (John 4:35).

Of course, the problem is really much greater than five million trying to reach seven billion. After all, many who are listed as members of the church are not as involved in the work of the Lord as they should be. Some are indifferent and inactive (Rev. 3:19-21), while others are immature and ignorant (Heb. 5:12). For many, the Great Commission has become the Great Omission.

As monumental as the task is, I am confident that it can be done (Col. 1:23). God has not given us a task that we are incapable of doing. With His help, we can do it (Matt. 19:26; Phi. 4:13; Rom. 8:31). However, if it is going to be done, it must be done one soul at a time. The good news is that each time that we convert someone, we not only save a soul from death, but we put another worker into the field. Just imagine what we could do if we doubled our workforce.

The Characteristics

As you know, men and women are different. God designed us that way. The strengths of men and women are meant to complement each other. Not only is this true in marriage, it is true in personal work. Women can be a real help in winning souls for Christ. I am convinced that women possess some characteristics that make them uniquely qualified as personal workers. Please consider a few of these characteristics with me:

Women are verbal.

Studies tell us that women speak about twice as many words per day as men. While wordiness is not always a

blessing, it probably is in this area. Just think of how many more people women can invite (Isa. 2:2-3) and how many more relationships they can build with the extra words that they use every day. Not only do women speak more than men, many believe that they are more effective communicators than men. Other traits that we will notice seem to support this contention.

Women are intuitive.

Women seem to have an innate ability to read people and situations. Many argue that it is not really intuition, but attention to detail. Women are very good at interpersonal communication. They are able to tune in to non-verbal clues that men sometimes miss or are slow to see. This ability is a great help in personal work. It allows the personal worker to better assess the interest of the candidate for conversion. It also helps them to know when to press a point and when to back off for a time. Women can sometimes pause a discussion before the bars of resistance go up and the door slams shut. As you know, “**A brother offended** is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle” (Pro. 18:19).

Women are multitaskers.

Women are often able to do multiple things at one time. For example, a woman can cook supper, talk on the phone, and care for the children at the same time. The ability to multitask is useful in many areas of life including the area of personal work. For example, a woman is capable of checking out at the grocery store, watching the baby in the grocery cart, and inviting the cashier to church services all at the same time. Most men are not able to multitask to this degree. They can watch the prices, but not the baby. Likely, if something gets omitted in the checkout line, it will be the invitation to the services. The strength of men is their

ability to focus on one task and to see it to completion. This is just another area where the strengths of men and women complement each other.

Women are nurturers.

God designed women to be nurturers. He equipped them with the skills that they would need to care for a husband and for children (Tit. 2:4-5). As you might imagine, these skills translate extremely well into the realm of soul-winning. Soul-winning requires much nurturing. Once the seed is sown, it must be watered and nurtured to produce fruit (1 Cor. 3:6). Patience and gentleness are needed to win souls for Christ. On one occasion, Paul wrote, “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Tim. 2:24-26). As nurturers, women are uniquely qualified to lead a person to Christ patiently and gently. Then, once a person has been brought to Christ, women are uniquely qualified as nurturers to help the newborn babe to grow to maturity (1 Pet. 2:2).

Women are less-threatening.

People generally feel less threatened by a woman than by a man. This is especially true when they hear a knock at the door and look out the peephole to see who it is. People, especially women, elderly people, and children, are more likely to open the door to a woman than to a man. Since the three classes mentioned above make up the majority of households, women have an advantage over men in getting people to open the door and to enter into a dialogue. Of course, getting people to enter into a dialogue is a huge step toward getting them to sit down for a study.

Women are women.

I know; this one is obvious. However, it does uniquely qualify women as personal workers at least in certain situations. For example, a woman could have a one-on-one study with another woman, but it would be unwise for a man to do so. Furthermore, potential converts who are women may be more likely to open up about certain things to another woman than to a man. Also, there are things in a study that a Christian woman could discuss with another woman that would be much more uncomfortable for a Christian man.

No doubt, there are many other traits which could be mentioned. However, the traits that we have considered are sufficient to show that women possess some traits that uniquely qualify them as soul-winners.

In this study, we saw that the Great Commission was given to women as well as to men. Secondly, we saw that the church faces the monumental task of trying to reach 7 billion souls with the gospel. Third, and finally, we saw that the church needs every person to get involved. Can we count on you?

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