

# THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truths of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

Volume 98-23

Dear Reader

In this issue we want to continue to look at the requirements to break bread — to have assembly fellowship together — under the conditions of the outwardly divided state of the Assembly testimony, the condition we live in today. We saw in the last Newsletter that 2 Timothy was written to give those final requirements, but we did not look at the requirements themselves. Of course, all the previous requirements we looked at still are vital, and the conditions found in 2 Timothy in no wise set those earlier requirements aside, but add to them. We will look at what 2 Timothy 2 says, first from the negative side, then from the positive side.

## **2 Timothy 2:19-22 — How to Find Paul’s Pathway: the Negative Side: Separation *From***

Until the time of 2 Timothy there had been both a visible foundation of the truths of Christianity and a visible house of God (the Assembly) built on that foundation. Whenever and wherever God’s people met together, they showed the truth of the house of God in their God-honoring meetings. Now, *outwardly*, all that remained was the foundation. It seems that Timothy wasn’t even sure of that! *What other than widespread division could have caused this change in so short a time?* Brethren had so turned from God’s pathway that it was no longer even possible in some cases to tell whether they were believers. Paul’s simple and profound answer was, “Yet the firm foundation of God *stands*, having this seal: the *Lord* knows those who are His” (2:19). Even if *people* couldn’t be sure, *God* makes no mistakes. The firm foundation was there! That was *God’s* responsibility!

Up to that point in time (about AD 67) every new believer basically only had one choice — whether or not to take his place in practical Assembly fellowship with all the other believers. It seems that most if not all did. However, after division occurred, *each individual believer* had to make a *further* choice. He or she had to decide whether to recognize the Lordship of Christ and to “withdraw from iniquity (unrighteousness — Greek *adikia*)” (2:19) and separate from vessels to dishonor (2:20-21). Each believer had to decide to go with those who split from Paul’s pathway or to go on with Paul.

No longer in Paul’s writings do we hear about the house of God and how one is to behave in it. Surely, the house of God, the Assembly looked at as the dwelling place of God where order is to be maintained, still stood firm, but *outwardly*, it became a “great [or, large] house” (2:20). Why? Because men and women refused to behave themselves, refused God’s conditions for a testimony to His house, and thus brought in all kinds of evil and unrighteousness. In so short a time there already were wooden and earthen vessels in this ruined outward testimony — worldly believers who refused God’s path and even unsaved professors. This is how widespread the defection, the division, had become in just two or three years!

There thus were honorable vessels (obedient believers) and dishonorable vessels in that *great house of profession*, of Christendom, of what outwardly but wrongly *claimed* to be *God’s* house. Paul instructed each honorable vessel to *purify* (JND) himself away from the dishonorable vessels (2:21) *by separating from them* — the meaning of the Greek word translated *purge* in the KJV and *cleanse* in the NKJV. We now can see three possible classes as follows:

1. Dishonorable vessels
2. Honorable vessels, but who don’t go the last step in separation; so are associated with sin and thus are defiled
3. Honorable vessels who separate from the dishonorable.

*Only the third class receives God's approval* as truly “a vessel to honor, sanctified [set apart], serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work” (2:21). Will we be truly serviceable to Him?

## **2 Timothy 2:19-22 — How to Find Paul's Pathway: the Positive Side: Gather With**

When Timothy was free from corrupting influences, people and doctrines as a result of separation, he was to do something *positive*. He was to flee the youthful lusts (Gk: *neoterikos*: those *new* things that attract us) of the mind and body. Many of us have become accustomed to indulging our old natures — to want our entertainment, our fun, and other worldly pleasures, including the newest things on the market to indulge the *soul*, to add a thrill — excitement — to life. *This is inconsistent with a godly life* (Heb.12:1-2). When Timothy had *fled* from the youthful lusts, he was to *pursue* four things. Each believer, *individually*, who wants Paul's Assembly pathway is to “pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, *with those* who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2:22). As with all “lists” of inspired Scripture the *order* of these words is important. Let's briefly look at these four words in their order as given by the Holy Spirit.

### **Righteousness**

*Righteousness* is simply practicing what is right according to the Word of God. It is the opposite of what one is to withdraw from — *unrighteousness* (2:19). It is a broad term. Those who had left Paul's pathway were no longer pursuing righteousness even though they were not necessarily teaching fundamental error and may have been living exemplary personal lives, morally. But they had deliberately turned from God's pathway, from what they knew to be right, to ways of their own choosing. *They simply wanted their own way*: God's way was too narrow, too demanding!

The first five verses of Chapter 3 are made up of a list of sins which *characterize* certain people. These were not people of the world, but professing Christians whom Timothy was to *turn away from* because of their named sins (3:5). These sins were not *evil* or *wicked* as men might consider the words, but more the idea of willful, continued *unrighteousness*, compared to the serious sins/evils listed in 1 Corinthians 5:11. This obviously is an *Assembly* matter because if it simply involved the unsaved we would have to hide in monasteries to get away from them. 1 Corinthians 5:10 makes it plain we are to separate from sinning believers, but 1 Corinthians 5:9 makes it equally plain we don't turn away from those of the world in our daily lives, although we don't get involved in their sins. We work with the unsaved and live in neighborhoods with them, and should be a testimony to them of the holiness and love of Christ. However, when it comes to the true Assembly pathway, a new set of outward conditions called for more care and watchfulness. *Righteousness* was to be maintained. Those professing believers who will not maintain righteousness, were to be turned away from. Assembly fellowship was closed to them as long as they maintained their unrighteous ways.

Consider the sinful practices that so many Christians are a part of — are associated with, *and association with sin defiles!* Some Christians gather on the ground of the *autonomy* (independency) of the local church, a clear violation of the fact that the Church is “one body” (1 Cor.1:2; 12:1-14). Others gather on denominational ground. We have seen *that* is wrong! In practice they deny Christ as the only gathering-Center (Mt.18:20) and by the evil clergy-laity system, displace the Holy Spirit from His rightful place as Leader and Controller in the gathered assembly (1 Cor.12:11) and deny in practice the priesthood of all believers for both worship and service (1 Pet.2:5-9). This is *not* God's True Ground! It's far from it! It is sin! Separate from it!

### **Faith**

Faith means *belief*. “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom.14:23). The obvious conclusion of this often-overlooked verse is that we need to be *convinced* that everything we do for the Lord is His will, or it is sin. Solemn thought!

Therefore, one to be received to break bread should *reasonably* understand the step he or she is taking. *Otherwise, it wouldn't be an act of faith.* Isn't that the simple and obvious conclusion from a very plain verse? Surely the seeker should know the gathering-principles of the local assembly where he or she seeks to express fellowship, and be reasonably convinced that those principles agree with Scripture; otherwise, one could become associated in ignorance with all kinds of error. Each local assembly is responsible in this matter to each believer who seeks to break bread, taking into account the person's background, age, etc. How can this provision be met if one is received from a religious group which meets on other principles than found in God's Word — which other principles the person thinks are correct and has every intention of returning to?

## **Love**

Because *love* is such an emotional thing with us, God carefully defines it when dealing with spiritual matters. Love to God is *only* shown by obedience to Him! “This is the love of God that we keep His commandments” (1 Jn.5:3). Love to the brethren also is shown by obedience to God, not the other way around. “Hereby know we that we love the children of God *when we love God and keep His commandments*” (1 Jn.5:2). Of course, the Lord's commandments include “love one another” (Jn.15:12, etc.), but the former verses remove mere emotionalism or human sentimentality from the practice of love.

Some say, “You don't really have love if you refuse to receive another believer to the breaking of bread.” We ask, Do I show love, or not show love to my child if I refuse him something he wants, but which is wrong or harmful? The answer is self-evident. As practical as Christian love to one another is, which can't help involve the emotions, we can never truly love or show love to another believer by compromising God's righteousness and holiness. It is *His* Assembly, not ours! *He* makes the requirements! *True love is not permissive.* What many believers call *love* will, we believe, be called the opposite by the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ. That future judgment of the believers' *works* (Rom.14:10-12; 2 Cor.5:10) will reveal that compromising-love was not love at all, any more than sparing the pain of the surgeon's knife is showing love to the person with an acute appendicitis.

We stated that God's word-order in verses like 2 Timothy 2:22 is important. The order is not by chance. The happy state of walking together in openly expressed love can only take place when the criteria of righteousness and faith have been met. Otherwise, to those waking in a wrong way, love in the heart is not free to fully express itself outwardly in assembly fellowship together. Love at any price is not a Scriptural principle. On the other hand our hearts *are* to be full of love for all of God's dear people and for the unsaved too. There will be ways to show that love, but *never* in a way that associates us with unrighteousness (or worse), or in ways that would encourage others to go on in any kind of sin, including a wrong ecclesiastical position.

## **Peace**

When true righteousness, faith and love are mutually shown by each individual, then there can be true peace in the local assembly — a happy condition indeed! Saints ought not lastingly differ in judgment, opinion or practice, particularly on major and serious matters such as reception.

## **With Those ...**

Although the above were the instructions for every individual believer who wanted to follow Paul's inspired pathway, that pathway was not to be walked alone. Timothy was, and every true-hearted Christian is, to find those *already* on that pathway and pursue it *with them*. The point to be made here is that the words “with those” show that one is not to go and start his own little independent gathering when separating from all that displeases God. Rather, one is to find those *already* walking on the principles and practices of Paul's pathway and then pursue it with them ... and with no other!

## Calling on the Lord Out of a Pure Heart

Those who Timothy was to link up with had to be calling on the Lord out of a pure heart. The word *pure* (Gk: *katharos*) has the meaning of “free from impure admixture, without blemish, free from guilt, cleansed” (Vine’s Dictionary: see *pure, clean*. *Pureheartedness* is the condition of those who are *pursuing* righteousness, faith, love, peace. God looks at the *intent* of the heart (the inner person) of each such believer and says it is a clean, clear, pure heart. Such believers own the *Lordship* of Christ. They “call on the *Lord*”: they recognize and yield to His authority, rule and supremacy over their lives.

Note that we all have a measure of unintended and/or momentary practical failure, but that is different from an *intentional course* against God’s Word. *Weakness* with attendant practical failure is one thing; *intentional unrighteousness* and *wickedness* are things entirely different. The first requires shepherd care, the others require assembly discipline along with shepherd care if the person will listen.

Therefore, if we really want to follow God’s pathway, and if we find those who are already following that pathway, then we *individually* are to identify ourselves with those and with none else. We aren’t to begin our own little group. That would be divisive and independency — independency from God and from those already walking on that pathway.

These instructions were completely unnecessary several years previous because there was at least outward unity. The vast majority of believers were walking together. But the above are *exactly* the instructions needed for each individual who is seeking God’s pathway when division has caused many available choices, but only *one* choice is pleasing to the Lord.

We already saw in the last Newsletter the need not to get involved in endless arguments (2:14,16). This again is repeated (2:23-24) because believers always will try to justify themselves for leaving or not walking a known godly pathway by making up some “Scriptural” reason, no matter how far fetched. “But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations.” A note in the JND translation says, “Foolish and undisciplined questionings — in general, a mind not subject to God, a person following his own mind and will.” Yet, Timothy was to earnestly help all who were in the snare of the devil (2:24-26). We want *restoration* if possible!

***The new and final requirements found in 2 Timothy are to:***

- ***Depart from unrighteousness and pursue righteousness***
- ***Know why you take the position you take and not some other position, and maintain your position out of conviction (faith)***
- ***Do so in true Christian love, and live in peace as much as possible***
- ***Do so with (and only with) those walking the Scripturally-defined Assembly pathway with an undivided (pure) heart***

**Further Quote from W.T. Turpin** (Johnson Print Shop; same source as last Newsletter’s quote)

“... having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His” (2 Tim.2:19). Now that ... is God’s side. We have nothing whatsoever to say to *that* side of the seal except to humbly own the fact.... But now mark what is the other side. “Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” That is *our* side of the seal.... There is a dear child of God ... in such and such a position; surely he cannot be wrong. I reply, That is not your side of the seal at all. You are using God’s side of it ... You say, But is not so and so a Christian? I am not disputing it, but that is not the question. The question for me is, not who is the Lord’s, *but who is departing from iniquity?* Here is the question — Who, having owned His claims, is suitable to Himself? A most solemn question, and that is the meaning of departing from iniquity. Where is the person that departs from iniquity? How little that is on our minds!”

RPD

**NOTE:** Just a reminder that we will publish short, kind, signed letters on the *content* of these newsletters. Send to Roger P. Daniel, 22240 Morley, Dearborn MI 48124-2127. We may comment on the letters.