

# THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

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

Volume 00-39

Dear Reader

We introduce a new author to the pages of the Assembly Messenger — Bill Hochstetler from St. Maries Idaho. Bill spoke on the subject of this issue in the Dearborn Heights, Michigan local assembly during 1999 and it spoke strongly to many of us who heard him, particularly, as with our recent study of leprosy by Leslie Grant, when so many today deny application of such Old Testament teaching to the New Testament operation of the local assemblies which are seeking to express the truths of Scripture and the Lord's will in their gathering together. Let's see what Bill has for us.

## **PRIESTLY DEFECTS: (Lev.21:16-24)**

In Exodus 19:5-6 God told Israel, "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The people answered in verse 8, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." They repeated this in chapter 24:3 after hearing "all the words of the Lord." We know that just a short while later they broke God's commandment by asking Aaron, in Exodus 32:1, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us." Their promised priesthood was conditional on obedience. They sinned and lost the promise. Not so for us.

## **Today, All Believers Are Both Holy and Royal (Kingly) Priests**

Under grace we read in Revelation 1:5-6, "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us [*a kingdom of priests*, JND] to His God and Father." Note, "*has made us*," *all* believers, priests! He has already done this without any conditions placed on us, because he knows that we, like Israel, are unable to keep such conditions. In 1 Peter 2:5 we read, "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a *holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

All believers are *holy priests* and as such are to offer *spiritual* sacrifices in contrast with the material, animal, meal and first-fruits sacrifices of Israel. I think the first spiritual sacrifice we should offer is found in Romans 12:1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies *a living sacrifice*, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." We are to present our bodies in a holy condition to God. In Hebrews 13:15 we are told, "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." Notice that *praise* is called a *sacrifice* and we are to do this "continually."

Then in 1 Peter 2:9 we are told, "But you are a chosen generation, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praise of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Not only do we have responsibilities toward God, we also are to be *testimonies* to those who are still in spiritual darkness. A good example of this is Matthew 5:16 where we are to let our light shine before men.

## **Some Things Keep Priests from Functioning**

In Leviticus 21 we find a number of physical defects which prevented Old Testament priests from functioning as priests. Believers today are seen in the perfection of Christ since we are complete in Him. However, we would like to make *spiritual applications* of these defects. Many of the physical defects of these priests in Leviticus 21 were permanent, but no *spiritual* defect needs to be permanent with us. We read in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But we still may have to suffer the *governmental dealing* of God with us. A good example is David. In 2 Samuel 12:13 Nathan told David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die." But it did not change God's governmental dealings with David as seen in verse 10, "Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house," and verse 11, "Behold,

I will raise up adversity against you from your own house.” “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord” (Heb.12:5).

Leviticus 21:17 says, “No man of your descendants in succeeding generations who has *any defect*, may approach to offer the bread of his God.” The expression “bread of his God” is found in verses 6 and 8 and clearly are the offerings which speak of Christ Himself as in John 6:33, “For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

In Leviticus 22:4 we read, “Whatever man of the descendants of Aaron who is a leper or has a discharge, shall not eat the holy offerings until he is clean.” Although every Christian’s place is at the *Lord’s table*, some are not allowed to partake of the *supper* because they are spiritually unclean. God’s desire is that we are not only spiritually clean to eat, but also to offer worship. In John 4:23 Jesus says, “But the hour is coming and now is , when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” Morrish’s *Concise Bible Dictionary* defines *worship* as “the honor and adoration which is rendered to Him by reason of what He is in Himself, and what He is to those who render it.” Also, “to worship ‘in truth’ is to worship God according to the revelation which He has been pleased to give of Himself.” Do I love and appreciate the Lord Jesus for who He is and what He has done, enough to give the worship He desires? If so, I will seek to live so there are no spiritual blemishes that would prevent me from functioning as a priest.

### **The Blemishes or Defects Themselves**

The first blemish or defect in Leviticus 21:18 is a *blind man*. 2 Peter 1:3-8 gives a number of characteristics that should be present in believers. Then in verse 9 Peter says, “For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, *even to blindness*.” This means that we cannot see things as God sees them and will stumble and fall in our walk. If we have a careless spiritual life, we will be spiritually blind. Spiritual things are only discerned spiritually (1 Cor.2:14-15).

Next, we read of one who is *lame*. A person who is lame walks different than normal people. The same is true of a spiritually-lame Christian. His walk — his life — is not consistent with what the Word tells us a Christian life should be. Also, that walk progresses much slower than should be normal for a Christian.

Next is a *flat nose* (JND). The first three offerings in Leviticus 1-3 are the burnt, meal and peace offerings. They are all called *sweet savor* or *sweet aroma* offerings and were so to the Lord. One with a flat nose is not able to take in the sweet perfections of the person of Christ. If I am not enjoying the perfections of Christ, it is very easy for me to become careless in what I allow to have my time and affections. My sense of deviation from the Truth is lessened.

Then in verse 18 (JND) we next have one who has “*one limb longer than the other*.” This is typical of those who are not balanced. It will be difficult for us to maintain a balanced perspective. For example some stress *love* and neglect *holiness* or *righteousness*, or we are very concerned about the *gospel* and as a consequence neglect or overlook the truths concerning the *Assembly*, or other doctrinal matters. All are part of Scripture and need to be in *scriptural balance*.

Next, in verse 19 (JND) is one who is *broken-footed* or *broken handed*. A lame person has a walk that is not normal, but a broken-footed person has *no* walk at all for the Lord. Many profess to be Christians, but there is nothing in their life to support the profession they make. Then, a priest who was *broken-handed* could not lift up an offering to the altar. Perhaps one reason we hear so little worship and praise being lifted up to the Lord in the meetings of the assembly is because our hand is broken. We are able to make all kinds of adjustments to compensate for a broken hand to enable us to do things that please us. But when it comes to giving the *Lord* His due portion, we are not willing to make the effort. It is much easier to make excuses or to depend on others to offer what we should be offering Him.

Next we have, in verse 20 (JND), a *hump-backed person*. We would call such a person a hunchback, which reminds us of the woman in Luke 13 who had to be *straightened up by the Lord*. If our personal business dealings are not honest and upright, we are spiritual hunchbacks. Then we have a *dwarf* who is one who doesn't grow properly. A *midget* is perfectly formed, but very small, but a dwarf may, for example, have very short legs with a normal torso. Mr. H.A. Ironsides tell of a man who was always bringing up that he could prove that Judas was not at the Lord's supper. He was so obsessed with this one scripture that he failed to grow in other needed areas: he was a spiritual dwarf.

Then we have a person who has a spot or *defect in his eye*: he is not blind, but cannot see clearly or properly. We need to have clear spiritual vision to see the path the Lord has marked out for us to follow. Next is a *skin condition* translated "itch" (JND) or "eczema" (NKJV, NASB). It gives a very bad outward appearance, often caused by a lack of something in the diet or exposure to the wrong chemicals or foods. Sometimes our outward spiritual appearance is not good because of an *inward lack* of fellowship and communion with our Lord, often because we allow ourselves to be exposed to harmful material and feed on the wrong things of this world. Then we have a person with *scabs*, which can be caused by a lack of care in our walk: we fall down and receive cuts and scrapes. Our walk needs to be "in the *light* as He is in the light" (1 Jn.1:7) so we may avoid pitfalls.

Finally we have one whose *testicles* were broken or crushed. He was unable to reproduce. This seems to be a real problem in the assemblies as we seldom see new babes in Christ. Have those with evangelistic and pastoral gift (who should have the heart and energy to go out and bring in, and shepherd the newly-saved people) become so involved in worldly pursuit that they have lost the ability to reproduce as God desires and has gifted them?

The chapter closes with the admonition that those with any of these defects shall not come near to "offer the offerings made by fire to the Lord" (v.21). But, "He may eat the bread of his God" (v.22). These defects, in themselves, would not cause a true Christian to be removed from the breaking of bread, but they certainly affect his functioning as a priest before the Lord and could lead to more severe discipline if not judged, confessed and forsaken, for continued *weakness* often becomes *willfulness*, which can then become *wickedness*.

God's desire is for us to be undefiled and functioning priests. Not only does the Lord expect us to walk pleasing to Him, "My little children, these things I write to you so that you may not sin" (1 Jn.2:1), but He also expects us to help *others* in their walk. Galatians 6:1 says, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual *restore* such an one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted." The word *restore* here means to completely or thoroughly repair. This can only be accomplished by those who are spiritual, who don't have the above blemishes characterizing them. This means that the *Holy Spirit*, not the *flesh* (man's nature corrupted by sin), is in control. Note: If a *sister* is overtaken in a trespass, it is generally far better for *spiritual sisters* to seek her restoration.

May the Lord so challenge and encourage us that we may be good examples of what believers should be, in all lowliness and meekness. BH

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The second article in this issue of the Assembly Messenger was sent us by brother Jake Redekop of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario and is very slightly edited for clarity. Its author is unknown by name and probably wrote early in the 1900's. The article fits well with brother Hochstetler's article, above. The author well makes the point that if we take a stand, *however correct*, on simply cold, legal "doctrine" or simply on "principles" or simply because of the *brethren*, and *not because of Christ and what He says is pleasing to Him*, we are on a wrong way. Then he speaks of those who refuse to go to meeting because some brother or sister is there, or threaten to leave because of not getting one's own way. If we don't go *because of Christ and His Assembly*, we go for the wrong reasons. All must be of and for *Christ*, and according to *His Word*! Are we drawn by Him, Him, *Him*? Let's see what our brother has to say to us.

## **CHRIST IS EVERYTHING**

In thinking over the Scripture, "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so walk in Him*, rooted and built up *in Him* and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving" (Col.2:6-7), I was carried back in thought to my own *real* start with the Lord. I had from my earliest knowledge of anything, known the gospel, but the time came when I definitely received Christ. "Will you trust Him"? was the question put to me and I said "Yes." I remember the following day that the name *Jesus* was continually before me. I printed it in large letters and set it where I could see it continually. It was just *Himself*, not the blessing that I had received, but *Himself*.

I could not have explained it all then, but now I see that the Spirit of God had led me to Him. It was not belief in a text of Scripture, but the *reception of a Person* about whom the Scriptures speak, and He was very real to me. I realized a personal link between myself and the Lord and longed to remember Him in His death, but I was afraid to make my desire known. After much faltering, I awoke to the fact that I was losing time and slipping back, for *I was not keeping His Word*. I had not advanced in this desire beyond what was *individual*. It was simply the Lord's love to me and my response to His love, but so far it was very real. And it was *Himself* and my desire to keep *His* commandments.

Then followed the desire to serve Him. I felt that to serve Him who had done so much for me would be a great honor and I have no doubt that He then gave me a definite call to preach the gospel. The opportunity came for me to preach and I spent days in carefully preparing a sermon on the wisdom of building on the rock and the folly of building on the sand (Mt.7:24-27). As I walked to the preaching room, three miles away, there rang insistently in my ears, "Behold the Lamb of God" (Jn.1:35) and all my sermon slipped out of my memory. I passed through an agony of exercise and the more so because on arriving at the meeting I couldn't even find the passage of Scripture that I had studied so carefully. And still the voice continued within me, "Behold the Lamb of God."

It was time to begin and I was reminded of this by a brother sitting near to me. I picked up my hymn book and the first hymn I saw was "Behold the Lamb, 'tis He who bore my burden on the tree." I was greatly comforted and felt I could trust the Lord to give me words to speak on the text, "Behold the Lamb of God." While I spoke an old man who had been long anxious, believed the Word and passed from darkness to light. I was greatly cheered and began to see the way of the Lord. It was as though He said by the exercise I had passed through, "If you are to serve Me you must speak about *Me*. You must begin with *Me*. *I* must be your theme." It was *Himself* again.

Zeal for the gospel laid hold of me, and day and night my thoughts were filled with the gospel and my service in it. On reading C.H. Spurgeon's helpful and delightful *Lectures To My Students*, I longed to get the help I felt he could give, that I might be more efficient in the preaching. But just then the Lord came in and led me one step further. A servant of God visited our town and in the first address he spoke on Matthew 18:20, pressing the reality of the Lord's presence in the midst of His assembly. It was a revelation to me. It was not the *brethren*, whether nice or otherwise, who made the meeting what it was. It was *Himself*! *He* gave character to the place. If I went, it was to meet *Him* in His own circle, where *He* gathered His own about *Himself* according to *His* own divine right.

I will never forget the light this was to my soul. I had to get away from everybody to dwell on it with the Lord. From that time I have been unable to understand brethren saying, "I will not go to the meeting if such and such a Christian is permitted there," or threatening to withdraw if what they think right is not done. To me everything ties in the *Lord* being there, and *if He is there I must be also*.

This was a great joy, but it soon involved me in further exercise, for I had to face the fact of *failure*. I discovered that confusion and division had caused much havoc in that which appeared to me so blessed and which I had considered to be above the failure of men. Moreover I discovered that even those who I believed held to the truth, had sadly failed in the *way* they had done it and in the *spirit* that had been displayed. That *party spirit* could have entered that sacred enclosure with such disastrous results was to me a heart-breaking surprise. I was greatly shaken and I wondered whether it would not be better to devote myself exclusively to the gospel and let all else go as being impossible to carry out.

But I could not do this. I had tasted the joy of *Christ and His Assembly*. To that I felt I must cling. I went a step further and learned that everything was established and secured *in Him*. I learned this from 2 Timothy, and I found from that Epistle that I could hold fast that which I had learned and that it would be as a light and guide to me in the perilous times. I had got the clue to the maze. It meant that I must turn my eyes from the confusion and be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, remembering *Him*, raised from the dead according to Paul's gospel, *and test things henceforth by His Word and authority*. It was *Himself* again as meeting the exercise arising from our great failure in the truth.

I can see how falteringly I have followed these things so clearly shown to me. Known only to the Lord and myself has been my continual failure in walk according to that which I see and know to be the way of truth. But to these things in His great grace He has held me, and how patient He has been. I realize that, in every recovery of soul that I have known, *He* has brought me back to the joy of these things. They abide and will so long as the Spirit of Truth abides on earth.

It is plain to me that everything depends on *Christ* always having His place. We have to receive *Him*, walk in *Him*, be rooted and built up in *Him*, every advance is in *Him*. We may have doctrine and fight for "principles" and maintain a legal separation from what is wrong, but if that is *all* we will become withered ourselves and a menace to the peace of our brethren. We will abound in thanksgiving as together we continue *in Him*.

There have been many crises in my life, too intimate, too sacred, to commit to writing, but I have found that if *He* has drawn near to me in them I have gained in spiritual substance, no matter what else I have lost, and I have feebly learned that for my own blessing as for His glory, *He* must be all and in all. He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and Last, the Beginning and the End. He is this for God, and He must be this for every creature who is to be finally and eternally blest. This is the lesson that the Spirit of God is teaching us today. Happy will all those be who learn it.

An unknown former Editor of *Scripture Truth*

Brother Hochstetler also sent an interesting little article from the 1940 edition of *Things New and Old*, written by a brother E. Noble. It is a practical exhortation for us all, in the meetings of the assembly, entitled simply *Amen*. Read on!

How many (particularly among the young people and sisters) both in our worship and prayer meetings are never heard exercising their God-given privilege of audibly responding from their hearts, "Amen," meaning "So let it be." What a loss is theirs! What a chill to the one who, offering worship to the Lord as the mouthpiece of the assembly, hears no "amen" at the conclusion of his giving of thanks! Think of thanks being given for the precious emblems of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, with only here and there a hearty "Amen."

I have known instances of men taking their seats after prayer with inward anguish, wondering what they had said amiss in prayer, as they heard no responsive "Amen," to learn later that it was the custom or common practice in that assembly not to respond. How sad!

Brethren, let us read 1 Corinthians 14:16, "... if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?" It was the custom then for others to say "Amen" at the close of prayer; it should be the custom now. How it would change our meetings to greater spirituality, solemnity and blessing!