

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

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

05-76

Dear Reader

This issue begins our ninth and final year of publication. We are so thankful to the Lord for making this work possible now for over eight years, yet we are struck by the words of Scripture as for example seen at the completion of the Tabernacle, “So Moses *finished* the work” (Ex.40:33). Essentially the same words are used in relation to the temple and elsewhere. The exercise we originally felt before the Lord was to bring the truth of the Assembly to a generation of believers that had not been brought up with the detailed exposition of such truth, right at a time when that truth was under special attack. To the extent the *Assembly Messenger* was enabled by the Lord to do so, we are most grateful. When one has a stable mailing audience of some 600 families, the tendency is to just go on and on, but we believe the Lord is indicating it should end, so end it will later this year. In His will we will have much more to say in that final issue.

As we begin 2005 we again want to remind you that our main translation is the New King James Version, used with permission of Thomas Nelson and Sons. We want to continue to thank Mike Doyle for the labels and the Kocharoffs and some in my family for helping to stuff envelopes. We also want to remind you of the website where these newsletters can be found, www.inthebeloved.org, which has all current and past issues for reading and downloading, if desired..

We have prayerfully sought to write in as non-offensive manner as we knew how, even though we know not all agree with all we wrote, but we have sought to bring Scripture to bear on what we have written, and we will do this again this year. A correct understanding of all aspects of our Christian walk is necessary for our proper walk as part of the Church of the Living God.

The first article in this issue is particularly my (Roger’s) exercise, and although not Bob’s exercise, I express my thanks to Bob for his gracious review and helpful comments. And I also thank him for his second article.

A brother used to warn us that the path God has for us is broad enough to allow for much diversity, but there is a ditch on both sides. In politics we often speak of the “left” (liberal, loose, almost anything goes, ecumenical, reinterpret the constitution, give the people what they want, situation-ethics, etc) and the “right” (conservative, exactness of the constitution, moralistic, right is right and wrong is wrong, give the people what those in office believe is right, often seeking to apply scriptural principles as they see them, as an absolute guide, etc). It seems that God uses

somewhat the same language. “Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; *do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left*, that you may prosper wherever you go” (Josh.1:7). Of course, we are not under the Law of Moses, but still God’s *principles* don’t change!

NEITHER THE RIGHT NOR THE LEFT

Many of our *Assembly Messenger* issues have touched on the left hand ditch where we believed a number were headed and some have either fallen in or are dangerously close to doing so. They have preferred a more liberal, loose (less scripturally restrictive), more man-pleasing “church” or “assembly” pathway than is taught in Scripture. We pray for the restoration of our brethren to the safety of the paved roadway that *is* found in God’s Word, and which firm roadway we have attempted to describe in these past eight years. We will not speak further of the “left” in this issue.

But the danger of the right ditch is just as great, although of a different character. It is interesting to note that our verse in Joshua speaks first of the “right”! We believe Scripture is more conservative than do most in the left ditch. And that is precisely where the danger comes! The reasoning goes like this: If I believe God has His pathway and I understand it better than most, then my views and thoughts should become yours – not as much because I show them to you by Scripture and *Scripture* convinces you, but because you must obey me because I am God’s spiritual man for the day in which we live ... or so I believe. That’s the scenario! And generally when someone or a group of people within a “fellowship” or even a local assembly does this, the views expressed are indeed conservative, but often beyond Scripture, adding to Scripture (Rev.22:18), although obscure scriptures may be found and interpreted to fit their personal views.

This may be why we read in Ecclesiastes 7:16 “Do not be overly righteous.” Although written from man’s perspective, it is still Scripture. If you or I decide something is “righteous” that Scripture hasn’t defined and then try to enforce it *as Scripture*, it is being “overly righteous” and one has fallen into the right hand ditch. Personal opinions on “modesty,” for example, could go all the way from wearing a burka to a mini-skirt. God just says “modest” (1 Tim.2:9). It’s not up to us to enforce our personal views! Examples could be multiplied. You surely can think of many.

Nor is this tendency to go beyond Scripture the prerogative only of the ultra conservative, assemblywise. For example, when a brother whom I consider to be an ultra-liberal in his assembly walk heard that a Christian family had one of the premium movie channels on their TV set (which often shows nudity and other sexual immorality common to Hollywood), he angrily stated they should be immediately excommunicated. Now, many Christians would agree that such programming should not be watched, whether on TV or the Internet, but I would be hard pressed to find Scripture for “putting away” such a family. I undoubtedly should warn them of the dangers to their family and to themselves in warping their moral perspective, but what was said by the brother is taking personal opinion into assembly conduct and discipline. There are some things of this nature that have to be left for God to deal with, and He *will* in His way and timing! The point I’m making by this example is that the two ditches, in one way or the other, are present in all of us, and thus the wisest thing is to prayerfully and with God’s Word before us, seek to stay as close to the center of God’s pathway as possible. At best, we will walk a zigzag course.

There have been individuals throughout history who have been very influential in this “right” brand of legality and its consequent misinterpretation of Scripture, often to a most serious degree. In 1986 right-ditch dangers were coming in among the brethren with whom I fellowship. Thus an open letter was written to every assembly and was signed by about 120 brethren, and it was very effective. Now in 2005, I believe something along these lines needs again to be said. I have excerpted portions from the booklet, *Modern Mystical Teachings and the Word of God* by F.B. Hole (Believers Bookshelf), which is very helpful regarding the teachings of F.E. Raven and James Taylor, Sr. and the movement that has been the outgrowth of these teachings, which pose dangers for each one of us. In what follows there may be many paragraphs between Mr. Hole’s sentences or even words. We of necessity have to leave out much of this 64 page booklet, including much of the false doctrines that have been advocated and still may be advocated among the so-called “Taylor” brethren. We urge you to read the whole booklet. Mr. Hole, the floor is yours

Modern Mystical Teachings

The school of teaching [advocated by F.E. Raven] has proceeded to further extravagancies. The roots of this false teaching can be traced to a time when many brethren adopted the idea that God always has one particular man for the moment, to whose utterances special value must be attributed. The teacher for the moment was incited to put forth novel things in an unbalanced way, which were hailed as new light by his followers, and he became invested with almost papal authority by his admirers. See 2 Timothy 2:16. Note: Don’t think this can’t happen today among us! Remember in Paul’s day, “I am of Paul ... Apollos ... Cephas ... Christ” (1 Cor.1:12).

Mysticism deals largely with ourselves. The seat of authority is largely transferred to the mystic and his impressions which he has gotten [he thinks] from God. Further, truth may be stated and Scripture correctly expounded *without the warmth of the love of the truth!* [Isn’t this also a very current and serious danger?] Mysticism promises a greater depth of understanding, which is alluring to [some minds].

One teaching said, “The unfolding of Scripture is in the hands of spiritual men ... the mind of God is coming to us through spiritual men, not exactly through Scripture.” The spiritual man thus is the great thing for unfolding Scripture, who is free to give us his own subjective impressions of Scripture! The truth is that Scripture is supreme, towering above the greatest gift. But the spiritual man arrives at the “truth,” an inner light, by the *formative* action of the Spirit within him and then puts his impressions into words. He takes the place of a priest. Scripture thus plays a secondary part and other believers are just “simple brothers” or “just believers.” Mysticism can imperil the most important truth by dealing in imaginative details which mix error with truth. There is then a double danger – the error will be imbibed (accepted) by all those who unthinkingly accept all that the teacher in question says, and others will not only reject the untenable ideas, but also important truth used to support the ideas.

One of the teachings the 1986 letter stopped was, as Mr. Hole says, when a priest ministers at the actual breaking of the loaf in the Lord’s Supper, he opens the door for the Lord to come in. Note: This false teaching should be stopped and rejected if it ever comes up among believers where we fellowship. As Mr. Hole says, This is a very glaring instance of how the words of Scripture are set aside in favor of the impressions of [so-called] spiritual men. The *really* spiritual man neither originates nor authenticates anything: he acknowledges that the Scriptures are of binding importance as the “commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor.14:36-37). He absolutely bows to Scripture.

Another teaching common to this mystical line is the denial of our Lord’s eternal Sonship. We took up this matter over a year ago in issue 03-62. It has become virtually a “test of fellowship” in so-called “Taylorite” circles. Mr. Hole, among his many comments on this matter, says, Because of the marvelous miracle of the virgin birth, the designation “Son of God” belongs to Him even in His physical manhood. This we all gladly confess. It is the effort to tie down the name “Son of God” to this, to evacuate it of all meaning except this, that we strenuously resist. He ever was the eternal Son!

We have glanced [in the booklet] at a small amount of the printed matter put out by this mystical school and what have we found? Novel teachings are put out which overthrow what has previously been taught as the Word of God – and the more the [teachings] bear this [novel] character,

the more eagerly they seem to be welcomed. Scripture is then searched to find something to support them. That something is usually thought to be found when *fancy* and *reasoning* come into play. Is this the way we should handle the Word of God? Are we to expound our spiritual “impressions” and then twist Scripture to support them? Our answer to this question is an emphatic “No!”

Mr. Hole closes his little book with the thought, No wonder the Apostle’s closing word is, “Children, keep yourselves from idols.” An idol is anything that would dethrone Christ in our hearts. Let us beware lest we make an idol of a “spiritual man.”

The 1986 letter, mentioned earlier, contained this warning which we want to include for all. It said, We strongly warn against circulating, promoting or even reading the writings of F.E. Raven and his followers. We strongly warn our brethren against anyone who ministers among the saints and is not absolutely sure of the eternal Sonship of Christ or the true manhood of Christ (human body, human soul, human spirit). We strongly warn against anyone who undermines those to whom the Lord has entrusted spiritual leadership among the assemblies, and who tries to form a party of brethren who are secretly or openly instructed in the views of F.E. Raven or of his successor, James Taylor, Sr. [or Junior].

As far as we know, none of the evil teachings concerning Christ are allowed anywhere among assemblies with which we fellowship today, but the greatest fear remaining is *elitism* – the formation of a party among brethren by those who somehow think they have higher truths or truths with which the ordinary believer wouldn’t understand or can’t be entrusted with – the “spiritual man” syndrome which Mr. Hole so strongly attacked. Diotrefes (3 Jn.9-11) was such a person: he must have felt himself to be very special and very spiritual, whether or not anyone else did! Is this not the “flesh” in the guise of spirituality?

I have friends in groups with appointed elders who “rule” with an iron hand. These “elders” have made themselves into a spiritual elite class without any scriptural justification, and they self-perpetuate! This power in the hands of a few can be a source of every evil imaginable!

I have Christian friends who believe the King James Bible (KJV) to be God’s choice for the English-speaking world. It is none of my business, regardless of how much I might disagree with them, if they want to exclusively use it for themselves, but something quite different if they try to insist that others exclusively use it too. Some otherwise very lovely Christians have virtually made a doctrinal “test” out of the use of the KJV. To them, anything else is condemned in the strongest language and the use of the KJV essentially becomes a test of fellowship with them. Then it becomes legalism! We’ll pick this example up in a future issue, the Lord willing, because it is important to have a

detailed example of how our past “teaching” or personal thoughts may be coloring the truth and leading us towards the right-side ditch.

Another “hot” example today is the young-old earth controversy. Many young earth advocates are *very* militant and it is truly a test of fellowship with them. It is certainly none of my business if one chooses to believe in a very young earth and universe or a very old one (although it can make for an interesting discussion), but when a particular view is *forced* on others as a test of fellowship or even in strongly denouncing, virtually as a false Christian, anyone who doesn’t agree with him or them, then it becomes elitism and legality. Such a person then has fallen into a right-side ditch. I say this because the age of the universe and/or the earth simply cannot be proven from Scripture. But if someone taught evolution instead of creation, then it would not be legalism to denounce it, because Scripture plainly teaches the divine creation of animals and man/woman.

There have been internet groups with certain spiritual qualifications, unknown to most and upon which others decide, to join. One interested has to be approved by a certain person or group before admittance. Experience shows the group(s) I’m aware of are or have been generally comprised of very “conservative” brothers – often brothers I would generally agree with when it comes to assembly order. While it may be claimed that these believers simply discuss Scripture, why then the secrecy and impression of elitism? Why can’t you and I profit from their discussions if we would choose to sign on? And get involved in any discussions? Isn’t it true that in the multitude of counselors there is safety (Prov.11:14) for all concerned? Maybe there is no “agenda” or attempt at policy-making in these semi-secret societies, but one can see how easily that could happen, or how deep suspicions can arise as to the “spiritual man” syndrome. Since we all carry the sinful nature within, often in Scripture called the “flesh,” none of us are immune to Satan pushing us into the right-side ditch when we walk too close to the edge. Many brethren have expressed and continue to express their great fear of such secret internet groups. Should we be involved in anything that causes such suspicion and concern?

So I urge you to be very careful of the right hand ditch! Satan really doesn’t care which ditch he gets you into, as long as it is not according to God’s Word. I urge you to have nothing to do with the so-called Raven-Taylor group, or Taylorites as they might be called today. Have nothing to do with their writings. Don’t keep quiet if someone tries to promote them to you: he or she isn’t doing the work of Christ. Tell responsible brethren. Under-the-table spreading of that which is false or dangerous must never be allowed to occur among us!

Dear brethren, some of you may have left some ultra-right group because God showed you the serious errors connected with it. But be sure that Satan can’t use the “bag-

gage” you were brought up with and which may still be clinging to you, to turn you towards anything that can even give the impression of elitism or being the possessor of higher truths. I implore as an older brother, all my dear brothers and sisters to earnestly pray to stay in the middle of God’s path, and to learn from Scripture where the dangers begin. In Him,

RPD

FORMS OF DISCIPLINE (Bob Costen)

Disorderly Persons (1 Thes.5:14; 2 Thes.3:6-15)

Solution: exhort, admonish, warn, withdraw from active association with such a person.

“Unruly or disorderly” means those who are out of line: they walk contrary to the apostles’ instructions (2 Thes.3:6).

Some disorderly persons refuse to work, but sponge on others. Have no company with such a person, that he may be ashamed (2 Thes.3:8-14).

One Overtaken in a Fault (Gal.6:1-2)

“Paraptoma” or trespass – intention of will

A case of ill-doing is supposed or is literally going on.

He is caught up in the sin, so there is no escape or excuse.

One so caught by sin (fault) is to be restored, set right, be brought back into line.

The one used to restore such an one would do so in the right manner. His life would be clearly fitted to deal with sin in a godly way which would be most likely to restore the sinner.

The exhortation to “bear one another’s burdens” (v.2) refers to moral infirmities, errors, etc. which God awakens in the offender and brings deep sorrow.

One Going on in a Sinful Course (1 Tim.5:20)

Solution: Rebuke before all. Example: Galatians 2:11-14

The sin must be of a nature that affects the public testimony.

A Heretic (Tit.3:10-11)

A self-willed person pressing or forcing his own opinions.

Putting away is not here prescribed, but admonition is needed.

If not heeded, he is to be shunned, have done with. He should be silent in the assembly as to any public activity, and no company kept with him.

A Division-Maker (Rom.16:17-18)

A heretical person who presses his own opinions of the type that will result in schism and division, and will cause others to stumble or fall.

Solution: To consider and mark them, and if they press their divisive views, they must be withdrawn from, put out of fellowship.

One Causing Personal Trespasses (Mt.18:15-20).

Going by God’s order or steps is necessary, as some persons take a matter before the assembly, that could have been resolved privately or by 2 or 3 witnesses, thus gaining or winning over one’s brother.

If the person refuses to meet, or he cannot be gained either privately or with others, then it becomes an assembly matter, and if he/she will not hear the assembly, then he is to be to you “like a heathen and a tax collector.”

One Guilty of Moral Wickedness or Sin (1 Cor.5:11-13)

This is not merely a single act which could be dealt with by self-judgment, but generally is a course of action, which is *determined wickedness*.

Solution: Excommunicate: Remove the wicked person from among yourselves (v.13).

Even then, the goal is restoration. See 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 where the exceedingly sinful man obviously stopped and confessed his sin (1 Jn.1:9) and was restored to happy fellowship.

One Guilty of Doctrinal Wickedness or Sin (Gal.5:9)

Teaching things subversive to the faith of Christianity and to the practice God has requested for His people.

Doctrinal sin leavens (spreads, permeates) just as much as moral sin (Gal.5:9; 1 Cor.5:6).

1 Timothy 4:1-3 compared with 2 Peter 2:1-3.

If the teaching continues we are to separate (2 Tim.2:16-19).

Self-Excommunication Because of Moral or Doctrinal Evil – the person leaves on his or her own volition.

The assembly still has a responsibility to deal with the matter and announce their judgment publicly.

All Discipline is for Ultimate Restoration (2 Cor.2:5-11; Jas.5:20).

There never is to be the thought of being glad to get rid of a person because he or she is a pain in the neck, as the saying goes.

All Other Assemblies and Persons Must Recognize Another Assembly’s Action.

Changing assemblies does not remove the situation, for if one is “out of fellowship” in one assembly, he or she is not to be received in another.

If the assembly action is questionable, then others may appeal that judgment and look into the situation, for the body is one. No assembly can refuse the legitimate inquiry of another.

Wrong assembly actions are not approved in heaven, and if proven wrong, it must be judged or separated from.

Bob Costen