

. . . By good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple . . . I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil" (Rom. 16:17-19). But how do they cause divisions? The very verse which tells us to avoid them tells us how they cause them, -- contrary to the doctrine.

We should deplore leaders who commend neutrality when the truth is being sacrificed, for the sake of peace. Such is spineless unfaithfulness. Silence and muzzling at such a time suits the enemy. God's voice must be declared for His glory. Here is where the fear of man, or of even our kindred, bringeth a snare. Well may they fear exposure who depend upon getting their heads together as a coterie of policy lenders, instead of being led wholly by the Word and Spirit of the Lord. These human arrangements are not the way of the Spirit of Christ. It is human energy "that causeth sweat" (Ezek. 44:18). It can "make a fair show in the flesh" (Gal. 6:12), but nothing more.

"David consulted with the captains . . . and with every leader." He said, "If it seem good unto you, let us bring again the ark of our God unto us . . . for the thing was right in the eyes of the people . . . They carried the ark of God in a new cart" (1 Chron. 13). But they had to humbly learn the vanity of their own device which had disregarded God's explicit word. Therefore David confessed that "the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for we sought Him not after the due order . . . according to the word of the Lord" (1 Chron. 15). David thoroughly humbled himself on this, the occasion of bringing back the ark in God's way, for David said, "I will yet be more vile, and will be base in mine own sight" (2 Sam. 6:22). Job was another unusual servant of the Lord of whom the Lord said, "There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God." Nevertheless God saw the needs-be of riffling his nest, and stripping him of his good opinion of himself until he, too, discovered and confessed, "I am vile," "I abhor myself" (Job 40:4 and 42:6). Is not this the most important and humbling lesson we now need? In the school of God, isolation in the backside of the desert is where God's most exemplary servants have been brought to know their own nothingness. Self-esteem, self-confidence, ambitious-self and self-importance must be thoroughly abhorred

as being hindrances to manifesting Christ. The popularity of leaders is a real danger, and Oh! how the flesh likes it. Demas' name means "popular." No doubt he got along well with his worldly brethren (2 Tim. 4:10). Ishmael "dwelt before the face of his brethren." But what a contrast we see in the utterance of Christ in the sixteenth Psalm, "I have set the Lord always before me." For us the exhortation is, "Not with eye service, as men pleasers, but as the servants of Christ . . . doing service as to the Lord and not to men" (Eph. 6:6, 7).

Through grace all His redeemed are regarded as faithful (Eph. 1:1 and Col. 1:2) in maintaining the faith; but some are raised up and enabled to be in practice faithful above prevailing unfaithfulness. Hebrews 11 tells of many Old Testament worthies. Besides the New Testament apostles, some are named as being particularly faithful, such as Timothy (1 Cor. 4:17), Tychicus (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7), Epaphras (Col. 1:7), Onesimus (Col.4:9), Silvanus (1 Pet. 5:12), Antipas (Rev. 2:13), and Onesiphorus during declension (2 Tim. 1:16-18).

We Need to Diligently Make Our Stewardship Our Chief Business

We are all stewards, whether faithful or slothful, of our time, talents, possessions and the use we make of the truth. "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke 12:48). "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). "As good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet.4:10). "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). "If ye have not been faithful in that which is another's" (Luke 16:12). "He that hath My word, let him speak My word faithfully" (Jer. 23:28). For these last, difficult times we have the apostle's second letter to Timothy, "Commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2:2), "for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine" (4:3).

Chief Men Among Brethren

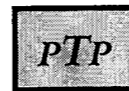
"Leading men" (J. N. D. transl.) of unquestionable report were the two chosen to accompany Paul and

Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 15:22). Surely we are not to regard them as being the most popular or ambitious to be prominent, or for having superior personality, or even possessing special gift, or that they had made a name for themselves by outstanding exploits in the Lord's service. Nor were they dictators. It is very unlikely that they were of the wealthy elite.

"The best are those who most know their own nothingness." They do know the loveliness of Christ. As such, their lives were fragrant with the humbleness and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. They had an eye single for His glory and walked in communion with Him. This delivered them from ostentation. Their hearts were warm with unfeigned love for their brethren and true concern for their welfare.

Their names are given in Acts 15:22 and 32; "Judas and Silas, being prophets." They were valued so that the Holy Spirit speaks of them as being "leading" and "prophets." The same Holy Spirit ranks prophets next to the apostles in 1 Cor.12 and in Eph.4. Also we may see that in 1 Cor. 14 where "edification" is mentioned seven times, "prophecy" is spoken of fourteen times -- 1 Cor. 14:1 exhorts us to desire the function of gifts, but especially that of prophesying. Its importance is to be noticed because it brings God before the conscience and His mind to bear upon our ways. Thus it is the gateway to the soul when God's love and faithfulness are made to be felt. Do we value the voice of the prophet? or, do we do unto them as was done to Jeremiah? "Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah: for the law shall not perish from the priest nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words" (Jer. 18:18).

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Unfaithful Princes

Between the shortest and the longest Psalms we have the middle verse of the Bible: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man" (Psa. 118:8). Then follows: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes," thus amplifying the wisdom and importance of trusting the Lord only. Again Psalm 146:3 warns us, "Put not your trust in princes." Such clear warning is intended to guard us lest we be carried away by pleasing personalities and accomplished influentials. One, and One only, is far above all others who is worthy of our entire confidence, God's Perfect and Faithful Servant, Prophet, Priest, Prince, Captain, Head, Chief, Shepherd and Leader. All glory to Him "the Faithful and True Witness."

The divine record shows that all others are liable to failure. Every dispensation is a witness to this -- and increasingly so in their extended course until God can no longer forbear (Gen. 6; 2 Chron. 36, etc.). Furthermore, yet awful to contemplate, the greater the privileges the more ignominious becomes the failure! Whenever man is placed in responsibility he ever proves his shameful inability. Malachi and Laodicea are loud witnesses to this. Our own lamentable lack of devotedness to Christ, our indolence in searching His holy Word and our lack of applying it to our daily walk, is the root cause of our leanness of soul.

Some of us can recall when most of those who ministered did so out of full hearts for the glory of Christ with liberty to minister to both heart and conscience, and we relished their faithful word. Fellowship in the Spirit was sweet, and was enjoyed by most. Prosperity, luxury and class distinction were things which the saints set little value on then, and those who were "well off" used it for the Lord and His work, rather than for their own pleasure and indulgence.

But what a change we now see! "How is the gold

become dim!" Faithful conscience-searching ministry is no longer regarded as "Christ-exalting" by many. Where it is most needed, it is frowned upon, resisted and called legal, with the intention of muzzling the speaker. They use such clever expressions as, "such ministry is only faultfinding, as it only occupies us with self instead of with Christ." Worldly abominations are thus tolerated that dishonor Christ. How applicable are the words, "What do thine eyes wink at?" (Job 15:12). Instead of faithful reproof, muteness prevails because of fear of giving offence (Prov. 29:25)! Correction, admonition, warning, reproof and rebuke are avoided where most needed. Smooth, ear-tickling words are given because they are preferred and considered to be more edifying! Courageous faithfulness is becoming rare!

It is because of this very state of things in these last declining days that the apostle urges us to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Commit thou to faithful men. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth" (2 Tim. 2 and 4). "Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things" (Isa. 30:10). "They abhor him that speaketh uprightly" (Amos 5:10). John Wesley said:

Shall I, to soothe the unholy throng
Softener Thy truth,
Or smooth my tongue?

"O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err" (Isa. 3:12); and again (9:16), "The leaders of this people cause them to err." How solemn to think that it was the leaders that were charged with the decline and departure of the people! Is not this a voice to us today? When faithful Jeremiah cried out against the abominations in the Lord's house, it was the princes who saw to it that the man who was disturbing their "peace" was effectively stopped. "The princes were wroth with Jeremiah and smote him and put him in prison" (Jer. 37:15). "The prince said unto the king, we beseech thee, let this man be put to death for speaking such words . . . for this man seeketh not the welfare of this

people. . . Then took they Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon" (Jer. 38:4, 6).

Later on, with the remnant brought back in Ezra's day, not all was as it should have been; for we are told (Ezra 9:1, 2) that "the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations. The holy seed have mingled themselves with the peoples of the land: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass."

The prophet Micah also had to rebuke the heads and princes (Micah 3), and the Lord in verse 5 says, "The prophets that make my people err . . . cry, Peace." Micah further declares that "the heads and princes . . . abhor judgment, and pervert all equity . . . (in) Jerusalem. . . The heads thereof judge for reward . . . yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us?" Such did the "heads" and "princes." Regarding this, Mr. Darby wrote that: "Nothing can be more offensive to Jehovah than that . . . His people should clothe themselves with the privilege of His presence, and use this pretension to honor self and justify evil, or maintain a divine claim in spite of it" (Synopsis). It is the same in Jer. 7; "saying, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord . . . and come and stand before Me . . . and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations"! How boldly the enemy has intruded and leaders remain mute. Some boldly declare that ministry which exposes evil will only cause divisions. They fail to recognize that the Lord's hand is upon us even though the mischief of the enemy is at work.

When Division Threatens, the First Cause is Our Low State

There may be a number of causes for this low state, but primarily it is the heart leaving first love -- an abiding sense of His great love. Satan, the enemy of our souls, operates on our fallen nature by presenting no end of lustful attractions, until the Lord's hand and rod make us agonize because of our departure, unfaithfulness, disregard of the Word of God, worldliness and strife.

When division has threatened, as it has a number of times in the past century, godly men have been used

of God to lay bare the evil. Both the state and the overt evil needed to be judged. The overt evil must be purged (as did Phinehas in Num. 25); and where the state is not judged, too, the hand of God will be felt again and again as in 1881, 1884, 1885, and 1890. But, alas, besides the godly exposure of evil and low state by faithful leaders deserving respect, factions develop (because of the low state) and bombard one another. Vain human efforts are used to bring about peace at the expense of separation from evil to the Lord. Instead of judging ourselves in deep humility and repentance before God, we blame Satan and his devices. (But see 1 Kings 12:24.)

The Second Step and Cause of Divisions

We have just seen that the first main cause is our low state, which state Satan has succeeded in producing. It is then that "the wolf . . . scattereth the sheep" (John 10:12). "We are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). At Corinth it was carnality and the worldly-mindedness of the saints who failed to judge themselves that produced schism (1 Cor. 11:18). They followed their favorite leaders, reigned as kings, walked like other men of the world and the lusts common to the men of the world became rampant among themselves! (1 Cor. 5:1, 2; 2 Cor. 12:20, 21). Therefore because of their shameful low state they were warned that "there must be also divisions (sects {heresies}) among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Cor. 11:19). Thus a complete rupture would become necessary. It was this same principle that was at the bottom of the first division of Israel. Through neglect of God's word and disobedience, "King Solomon loved many strange women" who stole his heart from the Lord to their heathen gods. Satan had accomplished that, through Solomon's lusts. Therefore, the Lord rent the kingdom (1 Kings 11:11, 12, 31; 12:15, 24; 14:8; 2 Kings 17:21; 2 Chron. 10:15; 11:4). So many overlook this, but it shows how the Lord must discipline by sloughing off that which He can no longer tolerate. It may be kings, princes or influential leaders who become the instruments, gaining sympathizers and followers. We have called attention to all this to show the vanity of so many vain

efforts to thwart division under the pious plea for producing "peace." Such is untempered mortar -- insipid. Human effort is folly.

We should contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered unto the saints (Jude 3), and hold fast the truth as to the "one body," "the one place," our "acceptance in the Beloved," "the blessed hope." But have we held that fast which has been committed to us (Rev. 3:11)? Perhaps we have in a considerable measure outwardly, but how about our really giving Christ the first place in all our ways? If this is lacking, then something more than talking about humbling ourselves and judging ourselves is our only hope (Lam. 3:18-29). I must get at the root of the matter by beginning with and thoroughly judging myself. Nothing less will honor God.

Self-confident Men Devise Mischief

"Jaazanian . . . Pelotiah . . . princes of the people . . . These are the men that devise mischief, and give wicked counsel" (Ezek. 11:1, 2). "They have seduced My people, saying Peace . . . and built up a wall, and lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar" (Ezek. 13:10). In the Hebrew this word "untempered" has also another meaning, which is "insipid." Does it not suggest "lukewarm" Laodicea? "Her princes . . . and her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity" (Ezek. 22:28). In Num. 16 we see imposing human energy at work. Presumptuous ones "who seemed to be somewhat." "Kohath . . . Dathan . . . Abiram and On . . . rose up . . . with two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous . . . men of renown . . . against Moses, and against Aaron." "The earth opened and swallowed them . . . and . . . fire from the Lord consumed the two hundred and fifty" princes. Neither their numbers nor their importance made a wrong thing right. Influential leaders may have many followers of the same mind who might belittle those who are otherwise minded. Disparaging remarks, sowing discord, increase estrangement, and factions form. Far better to "rise up" in holy energy like that faithful and courageous leader, Phinehas (Num. 25). We are to "mark those who cause divisions . . . and avoid them