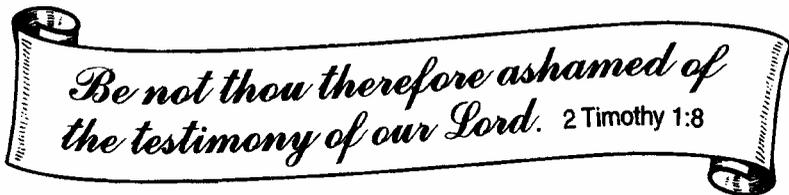


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"Your Sons Shall Prophesy"

God revealed to the prophet a stirring insight into the future. "I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions" (Acts 2:17). Today, the Holy Spirit indwells every child of God. Divine illumination assists the youngest saint to understand and explain the simple truths of God's Word. Parents and church leaders should encourage and exercise the spiritual expression and talents of their maturing youth.

Participation in public worship is an important part of Christian development. "[Moses] sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD" (Exodus 24:5). The consecration and service of the young men "under the hill" preceded the mountaintop experience of the seventy elders who "saw the God of Israel." The experience of assisting in the worship at Mount Sinai likely left a lifelong impression on these young men.

Joshua was one of the young men who assisted Moses. He was called later in life to succeed Moses as Israel's leader. Young men, harnessed to lesser responsibilities today, will become tomorrow's able leaders. The development of the next generation requires forethought, commitment, and faith.

Time passes without asking our permission, and the young often come of age before we realize. Parents may be wise to set an age when youth assume responsibility in family worship for duties such as leading the singing or the discussion of the daily reading. Sunday school superintendents should be alert to enlist youth to lead the devotions as they reach a determined age. The youth brethren may take turns teaching the youth class under the direction of a seasoned teacher. The entire class is stimulated to study their lesson well to assist their peer. Young men should have the opportunity to lead the devotions or conduct the singing before they go to Bible school or begin teaching school.

As congregations grow, they may overlook the blessing and responsibility of engaging their young men in the worship service. To ensure that youth are developed and involved takes special effort. Dividing Sunday school classes into smaller groups encourages participation. Subdividing

prayer groups encourages the younger to share. Another logical but challenging option is to enlarge the work by planting another congregation. The spiritual rewards of obedience to Christ's commission include youth who rally to the cause.

The natural tendency of older ones is to question the maturity and ability of youth. Rather than being skeptical, we should inspire and challenge our youth with high expectations as John exemplified. "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2:14). Trust is an investment that is worth the returns even though at times we are disappointed. Strength is developed through exercise. Maturity develops many times with the challenge of responsibility. An assignment may be a needed reminder to a youth that others expect him to mature.

The maturity of youth must be developed so that they can be used. Those who are asked to lead in worship should be worthy role models. Parents should be alert to develop joyful submission, personal Bible reading, and expression of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Proper appearance, mannerisms, and attitudes should be developed as habits before their lack is an embarrassment at the podium.

Young men may need coaching in proper worship procedure. Worship must be kept God centered. Opening greetings should always include reference to the Name of God. A reverence for God will avoid distractive innovations that depart from our traditional pattern. Two young men learned too late the consequences of carelessly offering strange fire in the presence of the Holy God (Leviticus 10:1).

It is possible to entrust youth with responsibility too early. Responsibility may cause a novice to be overcome with pride (1 Timothy 3:6). The size of the congregation and the maturity of the individual affects this decision.

God is building His church. "And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not" (Amos 2:11-12). The apostasy to which Israel succumbed will be avoided as we succeed in soliciting the spiritual contribution, dedication, and vision of our youth.

—BAS



Personal Contribution to Congregational Stability.

Stable is defined as "firmly established, steady in purpose, durable and enduring." God knew the patriarch Abraham as a stable person. "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him" (Genesis 18:19). In contrast, Jacob said concerning his son Reuben, "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel" (Genesis 49:4). Stability is tested by an individual's response to the circumstances of life.

Congregational stability is maintained by a common goal of faithfulness and loyalty to Jesus Christ and His body, the church. The apostle Paul declared, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). Each member of the congregation must personally have this goal. An appreciation for and adherence to a uniform church standard contributes much to stability in a congregation. Willing submission to the Word of God and to the voice of the church as new issues arise contribute to a stable congregation.

Congregational stability is important if our collective worship is to be God-honoring. Harmony and peace should exist between members. A stable congregation undergirds parents in guiding youth through their formative years. Seeking souls, weary of the conflicting pressures of an unstable society, are attracted by the refuge of a stable church.

Members enhance the stability of a congregation by their personal stability. A firm faith in God and His promises, as Abraham of old demonstrated, is a primary ingredient of stability. We need to know and practice the truth. And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the LORD is his treasure" (Isaiah 33:6). We need to allow reason to direct our emotions. This helps us to remain calm when difficulties arise in congregational life.

A father maintains congregational stability by faithfully fulfilling his God-ordained leadership position. He guides the home with love and devotion under the direction of Christ, the Head of the home. It is then a blessing to others, a stability to the church, and an honor to Christ's Name. By precept and example children learn to develop stable dispositions. Fathers train their children to develop godly attitudes and mannerisms and to overcome weaknesses in their dispositions.

A father adds stability by having firm conviction. Statements such as "Everyone else has one" or "Everyone else is going" do not pressure him to permit questionable gadgets or activities. He firmly supports the church's direction on vehicles, computers, cellular phones, and other issues that arise.

A mother contributes to the stability of the congregation by submission to her husband. Her example and teaching portray the happiness and contentment that is found in serving the Lord and others. She instills the principles of integrity, truthfulness, and industry in the lives of her family. She strives to clothe her children according to Biblical simplicity and modesty. Godly mothers have a significant, behind-the-scenes impact on the stability of a congregation.

Parents maintain stability as they loyally support the services and activities of the congregation. Under normal circumstances, they attend all the church services, including prayer meetings and Sunday evening services. Attendance at mission informative meetings and Bible conferences, where the pulse of the larger church is felt, also aids in maintaining local congregational stability.

Congregational stability is also enhanced as parents confine the majority of family social life and fellowship to other families who uphold similar convictions and priorities. Free fellowship with former friends who no longer share similar convictions will destabilize the family and congregation. Visiting should include all the families in the congregation rather than only those close in age or alike in vocational interests.

Grandparents contribute by loyal support of the church. Their keen interest and encouragement are valuable assets to the young parents who are in the heat of the battle with family responsibilities. Young parents who may be struggling with child training responsibilities need their willing, seasoned advice. Rather than accepting the "retirement mentality" of secular society, they seek to be productive and self-supporting as long as health allows. Faithfulness in prayer on behalf of the ministry, schoolteachers, parents, and youth is a valuable blessing. Grandparents carry a burden that the church would be faithful for generations to come if the Lord tarries.

Ministers maintain stability as they keep a balance between doctrinal and practical messages. Care should be taken not to promote personal views. Ministers strengthen relationships through fellowship with all the members of the congregation. Visiting regularly in members' homes, rather than only when there are issues to address, contributes as well.

Youth contribute to the stability of the congregation as they express loy-

alty to Christ and the church by their attitudes and conduct. Their faithfulness in personal devotions, Bible study, Sunday school lesson application, worship service attentiveness, and outreach activities strengthens the church. They must purpose in their hearts not to be fascinated by the new electronic gadgets that appeal to the unstable. The cheerful submission of youth to the church's direction on practical issues contributes to the stability of their congregations.

May the Lord help each member of the body of Christ feel the weight of responsibility to contribute to the stability of their congregation.

Brother Isaac.



THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH (PART 3) ***THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH***

What is the glory of the church? Could it be the beauty of the building's architecture, the sharp spires that pierce the sky? Might it be found in the durability and value of the building materials? Would it be possible that her glory is seen in her geographical location, perched high on the hillside, overlooking the valley or the plain below, or nestled among the trees by the trickling stream? Or is it the administration and organization of the church that produces her glory? Could the mission of the church be that which beautifies the church?

Obviously, the glory of the church has less to do with the church building and more to do with the members of the church. The geographical location, the building components and building design can enhance and facilitate the gathering of the body of Christ. But alone, they hardly constitute her glory. The mission of the church fills an important role in her life, but again, it is not her primary glory. While administration and organization are integral parts of the church, in themselves they are not the glory.

Is the reputation and fame of the individual members the source of her glory? Do they have an essential worth? Simeon of old, when holding Jesus in his arms, saw in Him the glory of God's people. Christ Himself prayed, "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them" (John 17:22). At least part of this glory is the distinction of being honored to represent God in the world (John 20:21). "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in

heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

The apostle Paul cherished the Thessalonian brethren as his glory and joy (1 Thessalonians 2:20). They had made much progress in the faith. The inward character of this body of believers radiated moral beauty. This beauty is not found in any other organization. It is the work and glory of God that effects such a transformation. We are presently sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6). The resultant light that radiates from the church is her glory.

What makes this glory possible? In Jeremiah 13:11 and 33:9, God clearly declared it was His work on behalf of His people that was the source of all that distinguished them for good. This is also true of the church. As believers, we share a glory with God on the basis of our relationship with the Son. The glory of the church is made possible through her sanctification wrought by God. It is through the Holy Spirit that the church is able to keep Christ before her and grow up unto him in all things (2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Ephesians 4:15). Any good that the church is able to accomplish is through the good hand of God.

In the Scriptures, the church is called the bride of Christ. As such, there is beauty in her being chosen by Christ. But the glory of the church may not detract from the glory of the Father or the Son. Christ has placed His bride on display as an evidence of His love. He desires to draw all men to Himself.

What are practical evidences of this glory? One outstanding quality of the church is the holy lives of her members. In the midst of darkness and wickedness, there is a people who have their sins washed away by the blood of Jesus. She is a body that is endeavoring to keep herself unspotted from the world (1 John 3:3). Therefore, many times she appears old-fashioned and tradition-oriented in order to maintain this haven of purity in a hostile world. When sin is tolerated in the church, she becomes a byword and a reproach to the Name of God.

Another display of her glory is the commitment and loyalty of the church to her God. So many people today are interested in what is popular and fun. "They think it strange that [we] run not with them to the same excess of riot" (1 Peter 4:4). But the church demonstrates the greatness and glory of God as she remains sound in doctrine and continues to uphold what is right. Her desire must always be "We will be true to Thee till death!"

The church's glory is displayed in caring for one another and sharing in each other's lives. Those not experiencing the blessing of the church find

such concern for one another difficult to understand. They marvel at how God's people are willing to give and sacrifice for the good of others. They crave the oneness and the sense of belonging that we experience as sons and daughters in God's family.

The harmony and unity of the church is a display of glory. Individuals, regardless of race or nationality, lose their identity in Christ. Through Christ they become one in interests, goals, and desires. In selfless labor, they give of themselves for the cause of Christ. Each one is interested in Christ—not himself—receiving all the honor and glory. How quickly the glory of the church is tarnished when schisms divide the body or discord is sown among the brethren!

Individualism threatens the peace and harmony of the church. Am I, are you, a part of the building program?

Is the glory of the church only for time? The Scripture speaks of Christ indwelling the believer by the Spirit as the "hope of glory." Presently we experience trials and sufferings, which will not be a part of our future glory (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 5:10). But "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:4). In the future glory, we will have glorified bodies. The faithful church will be given unfading crowns of glory (1 Peter 5:4). Until then, "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen (Ephesians 3:21).

Jesus, Thou Friend divine,
Our Saviour and our King,
Thy hand from every snare and foe
Shall great deliverance bring.
Sure as Thy truth shall last,
To Zion shall be giv'n
The brightest glories earth can yield,
And brighter bliss of heav'n.

By: Timothy Dwight.

Brother Dennis



Meeting the Lord in the Air.

Today we plan to assume our regular duties: repairing, washing, building, teaching, or doing whatever is our daily schedule. Unless today ... our plans are suddenly interrupted with a shout, the voice of the archangel, the trump of God, and our rapid ascent from this earth to meet our Lord in the skies. Are we prepared for and anticipating this interruption that will affect our eternity?

One of the most wonderful privileges we hold as Christians is the knowledge that, whether we live or die, Christ will return someday for us. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). This event brings on the consummation of God's plan for creating man. Since God created man for His own glory and sacrificed His own Son for man's salvation, what glory might await the appearance of His Son to take redeemed mankind back to glory? The thought of this event should be our ultimate hope and comfort as we go through life.

Paul spoke much of the return of Christ in his first letter to the Thessalonians. The Thessalonian Christians lived in expectancy of Christ's return. "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). Just as turning from idols to serve God is a proof of genuine conversion, so expectantly looking for Christ's return is an indication of salvation. It expresses faith in God's coming wrath on the unbelievers.

We will marvel at the sight of Jesus in that day. It will also be a crowning experience to meet our children, neighbors, relatives, and acquaintances we have influenced for salvation. It will add to our joy. Laboring to bring souls into the kingdom holds great reward. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" (1 Thessalonians 2:19).

It is God's desire to prepare and perfect us for the coming of Christ. "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love ...: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13). It is imperative that we allow God to perfect our love for Him and for each other. When our hearts are fully controlled by love, then we will be holy before God and unblameable at Christ's coming.

The final perfection of our person is another reason to anticipate our meeting in the air. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). Our spirit will have perfect communion with God. Our soul will experience perfection of personality and deliverance from sorrow and temptation as it is forever united with Christ. Our body will be transformed from its corruption and weakness to an incorruptible and unfailing strength. We will be fashioned anew in a moment at "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18). Christ's second coming is to be a comfort to His saints, but too many times in life we do not find the thought of His return a comfort. Since we have our plans for the next year, we might see His return as a disappointment. To think of a sudden, unexpected interruption might seem frightening. Or, we may have apprehensions because of what is revealed about the end of time. Jesus speaks to us, "Let not your heart be troubled.... If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3). This statement of Jesus was couched in a message of comfort to His disciples for the time of His departure. It is also a message of comfort for all troubled believers today.

The youth who live in anticipation of their future can know that God, who created their joys and pleasures in life, has waiting for them a far greater joy than they can imagine. The busy and stressful lives of the fathers and mothers are often comforted with the promised reward that awaits when their life's work is over. To the suffering and terminally ill, this promise brings comfort. Their suffering is worth the wait for a better place to which Christ is preparing to take them. The aged Christians, who find that the joys of life have well nigh departed, will find a joy in knowing that Christ is waiting for them.

Christ is coming to give His people perfect rest. All the saints of God can find comfort in the hope of meeting Christ at His return.

Brother David.



Passing On the Mantle

The mantle is symbolic of the prophetic office that was passed from Elijah to Elisha. This transition illustrates passing on the responsibilities of New Testament offices from one ordained brother to another. As with Elijah and Elisha, responsibility is often passed from an older brother to a younger brother. Older brethren must take the initiative to pass on responsibilities to the younger generation.

The mantle was an outer garment which was worn in the summer as well as in the winter. It also served as a cover while sleeping. Therefore, the Law commanded that if anyone took another person's mantle as a pledge, he should return it before the sun went down (Exodus 22:26-27). Men were often identified by the type of mantle that they wore.

Elijah cast his mantle upon Elisha after he was told by the Lord to anoint Elisha to be prophet in his place (1 Kings 19:19-21). After Elisha offered sacrifice to the Lord, he followed Elijah and ministered to him. Sometime later, Elijah was taken up into heaven by a whirlwind, and Elisha took up Elijah's mantle, which was left behind (2 Kings 2:9-15). The prophetic office had now passed from Elijah to Elisha.

Passing on the mantle takes time. How long was it from the time Elijah cast his mantle on Elisha until he actually took it up? There are three time notes between these two events that confirm a minimum of six years that Elijah and Elisha served together. There was one year between the two times Ben-hadad tried to capture Samaria (1 Kings 20:22). The second time note states there were three years without war between Syria and Israel (I Kings 22:1). The third time note states that after Ahab's death, Ahaziah his son reigned for two years until he died, just prior to the Lord's taking Elijah into heaven (compare 1 Kings 22:51 with 2 Kings 1:17-18).

Since passing on the mantle takes time, we as older ordained brethren need to ask for help early enough to allow for overlap. If we ask for help between fifty-five and sixty years of age, it should normally allow for ten years of working together.

Passing on the mantle calls for a gradual shift of responsibility. The first few years, the older brother carries most of the weight while the younger brother develops a feel for the work. Slowly this shifts until they find themselves equally sharing the burden together. Later, the younger brother carries the greater weight of the work while the older brother is declining in his abilities.

As older brethren we need a John the Baptist mentality: "He must increase, but I must decrease." This calls for a willingness to let go on our part, such as turning over the books to the new deacon, having the new bishop officiate in ordinations, or shifting the preaching schedule to allow the older to slow down.

We need to rejoice to see our younger counterparts grow in their ministry. We should never resent their growing influence in the congregation and the development of their administrative capabilities. Our hearts should burn within us when they open to us the Scriptures and grow in their ability to expound the truth.

The Lord told Moses after Joshua's ordination, "Thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient" (Numbers 27:20). This is done by expressing appreciation and support for the preaching and administrative role of the younger minister.

The Scriptures highlight the need to be clothed with humility when addressing ministerial relationships. This quality is evident when younger ministers respect older ministers and all, regardless of age, are subject one to another.

Passing on the mantle calls for staying close to each other. Elisha refused to allow distance between him and Elijah. Regardless where Elijah said the Lord had sent him, Elisha always said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on" (2 Kings 2:6).

Issues have potential to put distance between the ministry. Sometimes people try to drive wedges between the ministry. We may not allow this to happen whether we are the older or the younger brother. There is no substitute for good communication to keep the ministry united when facing stressful times.

Why did Elijah entreat Elisha to stay behind when he was about to be taken up by a whirlwind into heaven? Was it a test for Elisha, since he needed to be present when Elijah was taken up into heaven to receive a double portion of Elijah's spirit? If Elisha had allowed distance to come between them, who would have picked up the mantle? And how would the office have been passed on?

Brother Clarence.



Keys to Healthy Interpersonal Relationships (Part 3)

Mutual Consultation

The air was heavy with apprehension as David ran down the path. Coming to Jonathan, he asked, "What have I done? . . . and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?" (1 Samuel 20:1). Jonathan assured David, "God forbid; thou shalt not die.... Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee." These men are excellent models of mutual sharing.

Consultation requires humility. We face difficult decisions at times but find it hard to admit our need of help. Asking advice can enable us to formulate a safe conclusion. "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14). It is a sign of strength to seek counsel. By doing so, we admit that we are incomplete in ourselves and need the input of others. As we seek God's will, it may be revealed through one who counters our personal inclination.

Consultation requires discernment. In our need, we should turn to those who have experience. Moses was wise to accept counsel from his concerned father-in-law. Those who know our strengths and weaknesses are the best source of advice. The advice of God-fearing parents is safer to follow than the opinions of our peers. We should guard against seeking advice selectively, as Ahab did. He asked counsel of the prophets that would give him the answer he desired. Our best advice will come from those who are more committed to the truth than to us. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Proverbs 27:6).

Consultation requires transparency. In an effort not to hurt or disappoint another, we are tempted to step tactfully around issues without truthfully expressing our feelings. This can lead to misunderstanding. Spiritual growth in the church is enhanced by "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). When we are kindly frank with each other, we can trust in the goodwill of others' advice.

Consultation requires respect and true love. Gossip many times marches under the banner of brotherly concern. But the confidence and privacy of others is protected by godly love. "A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter" (Proverbs 11:13). The Golden Rule and the principles of Matthew 18 aid in discerning the manner and method of our sharing. "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth" (Proverbs 26:20).

Consultation must be couched in prayer. When asked to give advice, we should not feel compelled to give an immediate answer. By spending time in prayer, we may avoid impulsive words that we may regret later. "The heart of the righteous studieth to answer" (Proverbs 15:28).

—*Brother Mark.*



PRAYER POINT

*"The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man availeth much"*

*Pray that God would bless the parents among us
With wisdom to teach, train and discipline their children
While they are young and there is hope. Proverbs 18:19.*

*Let us pray, as Jesus did, that we may be perfect, united
in one as Jesus and the Father are one. John 17:22-23.*

*Thank God for His promise: "While the earth remaineth,
seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter
and day and night shall not cease." Genesis 8:22.*

*Pray that God would keep us conscious of the fact that
"all things are naked and opened unto the eyes
of him with whom we have to do.
Hebrews 4:13.*

