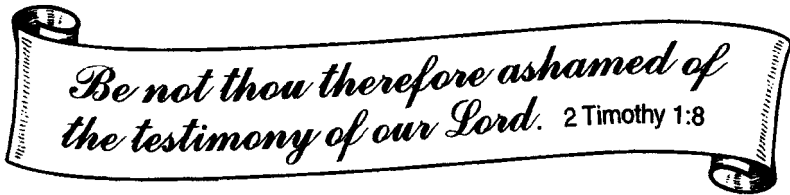


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The term ambassador is very fitting to describe the responsibility of a Christian to represent Christ's kingdom while living in this world. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Are we faithful and loyal ambassadors for our kingdom?

An ambassador is usually assigned by the ruler of his country to be a loyal spokesman to a foreign nation. Since he must faithfully represent the interests of his own nation, his loyalty must be well grounded and proven. If he would ever misrepresent the message from his headquarters, his country could incur great damage. To the nation where he serves, it would also be an injustice, because they count on him to clearly communicate his nation's views and intentions.

While serving in a foreign land, an ambassador must stay in constant communication with the headquarters of his homeland. He is to be ready day or night to respond to a crisis. He is responsible to share with his headquarters any developments he observes in the country where he is serving. In order to maintain strict loyalty to his own nation, he is not eligible to serve in any political office, vote in elections, or serve as a member of a jury or local zoning board.

Our assignment as ambassadors for Christ is even more encompassing. Jesus commanded, "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). Not only are we to be spokespersons for our heavenly kingdom, but we are also to personify the views, perceptions, and values of our King. This country in which we are ambassadors is subservient to our King. Do our divorced and remarried neighbors know that their actions are an offense to our King? Do our worldly "Christian" relatives know that the constitution of our King condemns their way of life? The most powerful witness may be a faithful example, but our silence could condone their sin. The Holy Spirit may work through an appropriate comment.

Do men know our Lord's view of disobedience to the Scriptures? A glowing testimony for the Lord does not justify disobedience. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). What could be sadder than for a soul, fully expecting to be received into eternal glory, instead to be cast out to eternal torment!

We are not responsible to judge men's standing with God. But we should

help all we meet to understand our King. "When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou halt delivered thy soul" (Ezekiel 3:18-19).

How urgent is our work? If we have experienced relentless pain, we have just a little glimpse into the plight of the lost. Does it really grip our hearts? Or do we passively accept that the majority of men may go to hell? How often do we stop to think how despairing each lost soul will be in never-ending pain?

Recall the most painful experience you ever had. Now imagine your despair if the doctor had said, "We can give relief, but you are on a one-year waiting list." That is 365 twenty-four-hour days of pain! But this pales when compared with what each lost soul faces. And the fact that his torment is shared with so many others will magnify the agony of each individual.

Does our ambassador calling really burden us? Does the assignment from our King weigh on us daily? Do we attempt to inject something into every conversation about the Lord? Do we give a tract or in some way remind men of the realities of eternity? God brings men into our lives in a natural way so they can be touched spiritually. Maybe today we can touch a soul for Christ!

—*Brother Harlan*



Blending Individual Conscience With Group Voice.

Group voice is an official position, a written standard, or an agreed-upon conclusion to issues that face the church. While various methods are used to develop group voice, it is the result of forging many individual convictions into a common understanding.

The conscience of every individual is a God-given faculty that helps men discern right from wrong. A conviction is a firm belief that something is either right or wrong. Convictions, which are formed by the conscience, are

much deeper than personal opinions or preferences. Confusing opinions with convictions has caused many difficulties in church life.

The conscience is developed by many surrounding influences such as parental training, peer pressure, and social influences. As individuals yield to the call of salvation, their conscience is further matured by God's Word and the faithful work of the Holy Spirit.

Possessing an active conscience and being part of a church that gives a clear voice on the issues of life enhance personal spiritual wellbeing and the safety of the family. One without the other is incomplete. If either one of these components is missing or not appreciated, both the Christian and the brotherhood will be hindered. When these two are properly blended, the group voice instructs the conscience of each member, and his conscience forms and strengthens the voice of the group.

Jesus prayed for His followers that "they all may be one" even as He and His Father were one (John 17:21). He also prayed that the body of believers might be at one with the Trinity. The apostle Paul begged the Corinthian believers to "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Even though this is our goal, too often we find ourselves falling short of this ideal of unity.

For blending to occur, a diligent effort must be invested in brotherhood unity: "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Without this resolve, harmony will not happen. The natural tendency of man is to put his own desires ahead of others' and choose a path that appears right in his own eyes.

The Bible must always be the basis of unity. At times God's instruction that speaks to the issue of the hour is neglected. May God help the brotherhood diligently consult and faithfully follow His Word and its principles! They are forever settled. The Israelites had an exemplary attitude at the giving of the Law: They bowed their heads, worshiped, and then said, "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8).

Sometimes the question is asked, "What shall I do when my conscience does not agree with the voice of my brotherhood?" If members of the brotherhood are carnal and the leaders are teaching heresy, one may need to seek a Scriptural church where he can submit. God has blessed some individuals and families that have taken this step.

But in many cases brethren agree on the principle but cannot agree on the best practical application. This does not mean that the church is unscriptural and its doctrine false. In such a case, it is simply time to blend. What are some virtues each Christian should possess that will help make blending a

possibility and church unity a reality?

Most important is love for God and fellow man, the first and second great commandments. Christ demonstrated this love when He gave up heaven to come to earth. He gave up not merely pleasure and possessions but even His very life for the blessing and salvation of others.

The human relationship of courtship illustrates the love we need in the church. No mountains are too high, no rivers too deep, and nothing is too costly to sacrifice for one we truly love. May we faithfully emulate these dimensions of love to the brethren and sisters in our congregation. Not only can love cheerfully give up, but it also knows how to stand for truth and still love those that come short of his or her expectations.

One of the faces that love wears is long-suffering and patient understanding. We acknowledge human frailty and are tolerant of the shortcomings of others. The repeated exercise of forgiveness will be needed for brethren to blend harmoniously. By patient understanding we acknowledge the different levels of maturity, remember immaturity in our own experience, and admit the need for personal growth. If we respect our brethren's conscience as we would like them to respect ours, blending is off to a good start. If we can see past the imperfections of our brethren to the wisdom of their direction, then we are prepared to benefit from the voice of the group. "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).

Humility is also very needed to blend personal convictions with the beliefs of others in the church. No one's perspective is best all the time. Sometimes it is our turn to be humble enough to admit that our brother's wisdom is superior. Humility is an outworking of love that cannot be hidden. When we share our personal conviction with an air of superiority or attempt to make opposing viewpoints look ridiculous, blending will become difficult and long-term unity will be hindered.

God in wisdom has blessed the church with many different gifts through various brethren and sisters. God has also established an order of headship in the church with Christ as the head over other succeeding levels of responsibility and accountability. This is for our benefit and the edification of the church (Ephesians 4:12-16). Blending in Christian brotherhood also gives us stability and prevents apostasy. Further, when God's children follow Him and are drawn closer to each other, their witness is enhanced and the kingdom is enlarged.

Brother Eugene



The Personification of God

"The Mind of the Lord"

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:33-36).

Our minds cannot fully comprehend the mind of the Lord. Even the person who has been a Christian for many years will be inspired by looking into His Word daily. God reveals new truths about Himself a little at a time as we diligently seek Him. We should never reach a plateau in our knowledge, but always maintain a fresh, growing experience. "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?" (Job 11:7-8).

Sometimes we are involved in a project that is not going well because of a lack of knowledge. We should always seek to grow in our knowledge of God, but be content with what the Bible reveals rather than being frustrated with what we do not know. "For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14). Our search to know God will someday be fulfilled: "We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). What God planned before creation was exactly how it turned out to be. "The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens" (Proverbs 3:19). "God said, . . . and it was so," and He also declared it to be very good. He overlooked nothing. Perfect order characterized every aspect of creation. Man, who bore God's image, was to dress and keep the beautiful Garden where he was placed. But man became disobedient to God, which brought separation from God. What had been sweet communion with God was replaced with fear, shame, and guilt; but praise the Lord, He planned a way back! God is "not willing that any should perish." "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son ... to redeem them" (Galatians 4:4-5).

We could ask the question; does the Lord ever change His mind? "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth," and He said, "I will destroy man whom I have created ...; for it repenteth me that I have made them" (Genesis 6:5-7).

When the children of Israel sinned by worshiping the golden calf, the

Lord told Moses to "let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them" (Exodus 32:10). Only as Moses intervened and pled with the Lord did the Lord repent "of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." "Who [can know] the mind of the Lord?" But we believe God is immutable. "For I am the LORD, I change not" (Malachi 3:6). God does not change, but God will change His verdict according to man's response. If the sinner repents, God will show mercy and pardon.

We at times try to read the mind of the Lord. Why did God allow this to happen to us? What good will ever come of this? "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33). "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Joseph went through hard times, but he later understood that the Lord's plans overrode his brothers' scheming. 'And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 50:19-20). As we face sickness and death, we may wonder what God has in mind. We may even call it a tragedy, yet the Lord may use this experience to "save much people alive." "For now we see through a glass, darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

We must trust our sovereign God. How wonderful the day when we will see God face to face and His Son Jesus Christ, the one "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself" (Ephesians 1:7-9)!

Brother Kevin



Current Counterfeit Christianity

A counterfeit is made to imitate the genuine with intent to defraud. A counterfeit deceives. "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15). Jesus calls us to carefully "try the spirits" and divide truth from error.

Could something as innocent as a sheep actually be a disguised wolf?

Satan, the Christian's adversary, produces sheepskin outfits for wolves today. Satan's counterfeits appeal highly to wandering spirits. In what areas might the Christian's discernment be tested?

Some question the importance of church membership. They emphasize a relationship with Christ but deny the need to submit to the body of Christ. Every Christian should desire to be a part of the congregation of believers. Baptism, which is a Scriptural requirement for salvation, unites one with the saints (Acts 2:40-41). Church members are responsible to and responsible for the brethren. An individual who separates himself from the authority of the church greatly hinders God's ability to work in his life. Humbly accepting directives from our brethren is vital to our spiritual growth and safety. Joining a church with lower standards to accommodate a selfish agenda can make one feel secure without true surrender to God.

Basing one's salvation on traditional practice can be a counterfeit. We must recognize and embrace traditions of the church as safeguards against drift and apostasy. Traditions have helped in maintaining the doctrine of separation and keeping each generation thinking together. Traditional practices alone, however, are not enough. They must be the outworking of conversion, discipleship, and allegiance to a Scriptural church. Traditions are an invaluable aid in sanctification but do not save in themselves.

We must also beware of the counterfeit of a partial gospel in evangelism. Believing and confessing are initial steps of salvation, but one cannot stop there. A genuine conversion experience issues into the victorious life of forsaking sin and living in obedience to Christ. This is the more difficult aspect of the Christian life that we cannot overlook.

An overemphasis on evangelism can be a substitute for true discipleship. We must avoid becoming so involved in activities that we fail to minister to our own family. If we save our neighbor but lose our family, what have we gained? As we are faithful in our personal lives and in our homes, we will be well-equipped for opportunities to testify for Christ.

Modern "Christian" music can be counterfeit worship. God has created us to enjoy music. Singing is a form of worship that lifts our spirits, refreshes our souls, and is an emotional outlet of praise to our Creator. "Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19) truly honor God. But a broad spectrum of "Christian" music does not glorify God. Aggressive syncopation, dissonant chords, and a heavy beat drown out a restless, empty, and dissatisfied spirit. Cheap, undignified, or repetitious wording warp a proper view of God and Christian experience.

The health-and-wealth gospel is a counterfeit. Affluence and an easy life can lure us into feeling comfortable and secure when, in reality, we have forgotten that Christ's followers are only "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13)!

Money and modern inventions can be used wisely in such needs as spreading the Gospel. But these material blessings have made life so easy that we tend to be unskillful soldiers in facing the rigors of cross-bearing and self-denial. Jesus warned, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24). Are we remembering to place our confidence in God if we trust in technology to keep us safe and solve our problems? "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17).

Nominal Christian counselors dress worldly psychology in sheep's clothing as a counterfeit to Biblical exhortation. Guiding the young and weak, the older teaching the younger, and being a sounding board for each other are valuable gifts in the church. Every member should be compassionate, encouraging, and ready to listen. When special needs arise, we should seek help from among the brethren. They may recommend medical treatment or special emotional help where needed.

We need to be alert to the danger of becoming emotionally dependent on another person instead of leaning on the Lord and His promises. We also need to take personal responsibility for our choices rather than laying blame on others for our failures.

Child training presents a challenge for which there are counterfeit solutions. The "time out" method versus the Scriptural use of the rod looks inviting as a less painful route for both child and parents. Sometimes parents simply excuse misconduct, reasoning that the child will get over it or out-grow this stage.

The Book of Proverbs gives timeless, forthright teaching. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (Proverbs 22:15). "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying" (Proverbs 19:18). "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Proverbs 13:24).

Love must always motivate discipline. We must keep the goal in view. The pain of training a young child will spare him much greater pain when he is older, and even in eternity. Parents must pray earnestly for wisdom

and endurance in this fleeting opportunity to guide their children in God's way.

When we pay for our groceries, the cashier usually strokes the twenty-dollar bills with a special pen for detecting counterfeit money. Do we have any detecting pen for counterfeit Christianity? Jesus gave us an excellent marker: "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:16-20).

Brother David



THE POWER OF SUBMISSION

Daniel Kauffman (1865-1944)

From Gospel Herald, April 23, 1914

There is a power that overawes, and a power that wins. As an example of the former, we think of God's manifestation of power in Mt. Sinai—so terrible that even the stout-hearted Moses confessed, "I exceedingly fear and quake." More glorious still is the manifestation of God's power on Calvary. With lamb-like meekness the blessed Son submitted to all the indignities which His enemies cared to heap upon Him, though He had only to say the word that would bring down legions of heaven to His rescue. He died dishonoured, discredited, disowned—yet His obedience to "the death of the cross" was the most powerful victory ever won, and millions in glory will sound His everlasting praise.

Many read the admonition to "obey them that have the rule over you" with an air of contempt, thinking it but an arbitrary interference with their liberties. But they do not know that it is but a bid for their freedom. It was Christ's submission that made Him King. It is our submission to God that frees us from the shackles of sin and admits us to the power of heaven.

Did you ever see a really great leader in the church who was not loyal to the core, submissive to the powers that be, an even greater servant than he

was a leader? It is they who have not yet experienced the grace and power of submission who are hampered in their labors by a leanness of soul. "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it."

"He that is greatest among you, let him be servant of all." They who vacate self completely and let God take complete possession of their being are the ones who accomplish great things for God. Surrender to God, loyalty to His Word, submission to His institution, the Church, and unfeigned love and service to God and man is the key that unlocks the door to the throne and admits you to the realms of power with God and man.



Keys to a Clear Conscience (Part 4)

Supporting the Church Discipline

God has given the church authority to make practical application to Biblical principles. Acts 15 gives us an example of how the church dealt with issues that arose. The conclusion of the apostles and elders was written and distributed to the church. "They delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem" (Acts 16:4).

Why is it necessary to have a written church discipline? Could we not each make our own applications? History has shown that we all need the guidance and stability that a church discipline provides. By ourselves, we are prone to individualism and inconsistency. Practical applications to Biblical principles help keep the church pure and holy. When becoming a member, each one volunteers to live by these standards. The church must carry out discipline if we do not live by our commitment.

At our council meetings, we give assent that we are in harmony with the Discipline of the church. We cannot maintain a clear conscience if we are not fully supporting the standards.

How do we support the Discipline? We show our support by following the spirit and not just the letter of the standard. The written standards cannot make application to every situation we face. We have enough guidelines to know what is expected of a Christian. When we follow the spirit, we will not do the bare minimum but will remain well within the standard.

How we talk about the church Discipline reveals our support or lack of it. We should not speak cynically of church leaders for the line they draw. Perhaps we do view an issue differently, but we should still wholeheartedly support the church's position.

Only when we support the Discipline will we actively promote it. We will be active in witnessing and inviting others to church. We cannot make the church attractive to others if we are not committed ourselves. Our lives have a great influence on our children and on those observing us.

When members violate the Discipline of the church and are unrepentant, their membership is terminated. "Those members who stand by such who are out of fellowship place themselves in the same state" (Rules and Discipline, Art.VII, no. 9). In order for church discipline to be redemptive, it must be supported by the members.

What is the result of supporting the church Discipline? The church is strengthened. There is unity in the brotherhood and our witness is not hindered. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1). God can bless His people, and His church can grow and prosper.

"Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing" (Philippians 3:16).

—*Brother David*



PRAYER POINT

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

*Thank God that He so loved the world that He
Gave His only begotten Son that whosoever
Believeth in Him, should not perish but have eternal life.*

*Pray for those who are on the mission fields to help spread
The Gospel to those who do not know the Lord.*

