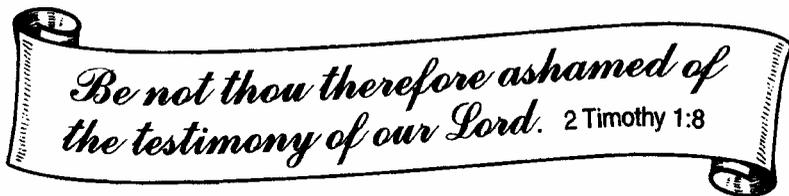


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The Scriptures record a time when the discussion of eschatology created more heat than light. Paul took advantage of the Pharisees' and Sadducees' dissension over prophecy to divide them at his trial. He ignited debate and courted the sympathy of the Pharisees by proclaiming, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question" (Acts 23:6).

The resurrection doctrine in their times was a contentious prophetic issue much like some we face. "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both" (Acts 23:8). Paul's proclamation had much the same effect as if someone today would say, "I am being judged for believing in the millennial reign of Christ." The account of Paul's trial contains lessons that will enable us to keep a study of the prophetic Scriptures edifying and God honoring.

Reverently guard the handling of the Scriptures. The Pharisees and Sadducees fell into the common trap of arguing their differences rather than searching the Scriptures for truth. An open Bible is essential to its correct interpretation. Jesus told the Sadducees, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29). Our discussion will be valuable to the extent that it illuminates Scripture. The Scriptures bring focus to a discussion. God has revealed as much of the future as we need to know. Speculation and conjecture may entertain, but they ultimately weaken faith in the truth.

Strive for reconciliation rather than division. It appears that Paul intended to court the loyalty of the Pharisees to divide the court. God used the dissension in the court in this case to save Paul's life. However, Satan also uses dissension to destroy good causes. We should always strive for unity of doctrine, "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2).

We should never compromise truth for peace but keep an open mind to where truth can unify us. The carnal impulse that enjoys argumentation must be crucified in order to be redemptive. The art of listening must be developed in order to discuss any subject fairly and redemptively. Although dissension may be a necessary part of discussion, it must always be regulated by Christian charity.

Do not allow an interest in prophecy to override other essential issues. The court was sidetracked from its purpose. We have a higher cause and must keep God's intention of revealed prophecy in focus. "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14). Any truth can be overemphasized to the point that we are weaker for the lack of balance.

Guard fellowship lines. We will err like the Pharisees if we indiscriminately accept everyone who agrees with our view of prophecy. Although the Pharisees had faith in a literal resurrection, they rejected the Messiah that provided it. Being united with others in prophetic interest may tend to lower our guard to other errors of their doctrine. A publication that endorses our view of prophecy may hold wrong views of redemption, separation of church and state, and nonresistance. Satan loves to mix error with truth, so we must be critical of all teaching. Social interaction and association with apostate or Protestant groups will weaken our conviction in separation from the world. We should not attend prophecy meetings of those who do not share our convictions on nonresistance and separation.

Grow in faith. Satan has effectively destroyed faith by entangling the truth with controversy.

We would not compromise separation from the world if it creates controversy and schism. Just the same, we should not skirt the doctrine of the future. Its inspiration and edification is a spiritual stimulus in our age of dying faith. Ignorance of any part of Scripture is the foothold of heresy. Even if we do not always agree, the collective discussion should illuminate the Scriptures.

The unfolding fulfillment of Scripture confirms the divine authorship of the Scriptures. God blesses those who accept His Word even when its fulfillment seems unlikely. The Sadducees erred in their unbelief. The Pharisees' faith in the literal fulfillment of the resurrection is to be appreciated. God will glorify Himself by doing the humanly impossible and unbelievable. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

May we turn our eyes heavenward in these momentous times. "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

—BAS



"Cast Thy Bread Upon the Waters"

"Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days" (Ecclesiastes 11:1). Time and eternity will return the investments that we have made in life. Choices of life may appear insignificant at the time, but unlike natural bread that soon fades away when cast into water, our decisions will revisit us in life or in death.

The results of our choices are pushed along with the swells of time. Their influence will widen to succeeding generations, helping or hindering the lives of others. Wise decisions of our forefathers bless us to an extent that they never could have imagined. We reap the blessing for the stand they took to establish Christian day schools, to forgo life insurances, and to refuse government subsidies. Other choices made by homes and churches have established lines of separation and practical Scriptural applications which have preserved the faith for us.

When we deny self and take up the cross of Christ, we cast bread upon the waters. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). The choice to submit our life to Christ is the most important investment we can make. This choice is paramount to all others. Life will be a disappointed frustration if it is not lived for Christ. There may be immediate rewards; however, the ultimate reward will be experienced in heaven.

Prayer is a labor that often seems to have no immediate return. Job and Abraham are examples of men who were rewarded for intercession. We should pray for the deliverance of lost souls. Like Paul, we should pray often for the faithfulness of others. "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Colossians 1:9). Will eternity reveal that many children have reached heaven because of a praying mother or grandmother?

The time and energy of building Christian homes is an investment in the future. Christian homes are the grid on which children connect the dots of life. Just as our minds subconsciously reference our parental homes when making decisions today, so our choices in turn affect the choices of our children tomorrow. Do our homes communicate the fear of God? "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10).

This fear directs each decision of life. When individuals have this guiding force in their hearts, it is a guide they cannot escape. When one is tempted to flee present authorities, the fear of God reminds him that he must still

give account to God. We must strengthen our homes and churches by casting this bread upon the water! Will our children enjoy the blessings that we enjoy today?

The Christian casts bread by living an exemplary life. Our children likely will do what we do—above what we say. They can sense our attitudes. Do they feel our loyalty to the brotherhood, or do they sense a critical spirit? Parents should live by principles of truth and require the same of their children.

The Rechabites are remembered for standing by what they were taught, irrespective of what others were doing. Individuals have argued that various areas of practical Christian life are of little value. However, many have lost their way who have lightly esteemed that which has helped to anchor them to the solid Rock, Christ Jesus.

Worship that is cast upon the waters will perpetuate the faith. Elkanah and Hannah are an example of parents who worshiped regularly. From early childhood, children sense faith when their parents call out to God. Daily family worship nurtures this concept. Just a little seed is sown each day, but after many days the fruit begins to appear. Our children's concept of God is molded by their parent's relationship with Him. The routine of personal worship brings us to God. We must not depend upon feeling alone to inspire us in the practice of worship.

We must set our priorities according to eternal goals and not by worldly standards. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Hebrews 11:7). Priorities are not always spoken but are rather seen in daily routine.

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . . and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19, 20). How often do we neglect the opportunity to cast this bread upon the waters? This command is a call to every saint of each generation. Every child of God can testify of what Jesus has done for him. A word in the grocery store or a tract at the gas station may touch a seeking soul. Above all, may our example point souls to Christ! One testified that her first introduction to Plain People was in a public eating place when a family bowed their heads for prayer before the meal.

Mankind by nature seeks an immediate return for investments in life. While joy in service is a blessing we feel today, some rewards are realized only after many days. Decisions made today set the stage for future deci-

sions. "Each victory will help you some other to win." In this way our bread returns after many days.

We are nourished with the reclaimed bread of faithful children. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." This blessing is not of our work alone but comes by the grace of God. There is a reward in seeing the faith passed from generation to generation.

We are blessed as we see others joining the ranks with Christ. We look forward to heaven, where eternity will return all the bread that was cast. "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain" (James 5:7).
Brother Mark.



PARTAKING OF COMMUNION UNWORTHILY.

When "Christ our passover" went to the cross to suffer and die, He revealed to man the depths of divine love. A sincere believer will often reflect on the suffering of his Savior and will desire to be part of a Scriptural church that commemorates Christ's death. However, even in our commemoration we may fail to appreciate His death as we should. "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:27).

To partake of Communion "unworthily" means to share in this ordinance without a life that agrees with its symbolic importance. Consequently, we are showing irreverence toward Christ and His death if we partake of Communion when our lives are not cleansed from sin. Only one who has been washed in the blood of Christ and is living a transformed life can rightly partake of Communion.

As we break the bread and drink the cup, we acknowledge that Christ has suffered and died for us. We are also proclaiming that we have received the provision of God's salvation and that the blood of Christ has cleansed and is continuing to cleanse our lives.

A casual attitude toward the Christian life, which allows room for carnality and responds with Adamic impulses, will render us unworthy to partake of Communion. If we continue to live an unsanctified life without regret and repentance, yet claim to be born again and partake of Communion, we are mocking Christ.

It is as if we are telling God, "Your provision is not sufficient, the blood

of Christ cannot totally cleanse me, and Your power is unable to totally transform me." Let us take careful heed to Apostle Paul's admonition to the Corinthians: "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8).

If we claim Christ as our personal Redeemer we must also acknowledge Him as Lord. When He is our Lord, every thought, every word, and every action are subject to His approval. Our wills are surrendered to His will and our desires are aligned with His desires. What brings us joy and sorrow corresponds with what brings our Lord joy and sorrow. Our sole desire will be to glorify Christ in all things.

And so we desire to partake of Communion worthily. Therefore, we take seriously the Scriptural injunction to "examine [ourselves]" (1 Corinthians 11:28). Examine means "to test," and we have only one standard, the Word of God, by which to test ourselves. We begin with the words of Christ and His apostles. With open hearts we look at the direction of the Sermon on the Mount and consider, "Does my life exhibit the life that my Lord portrayed in this sermon?" We ought to meditate on the transformed life described in Romans 12 and, by God's power, make these characteristics ours. We should look at the mirror of the Book of James, which challenges practical aspects of our Christian life. As we continue to test ourselves we ought to fall down in humility and cry out, "Mold me according to Thy will; make me more like Christ, my Lord, who died for me."

A devoted believer will desire to examine himself rather than to experience damnation (1 Corinthians 11:29). When we persist in living an unsurrendered life, we are placing ourselves under God's judgment. We know God's will; therefore, God has every right to cast us into hell. Let us judge ourselves according to God's Word so that God will not need to condemn us.

"For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:30). We as congregations and individuals too often lack the power of God because we are not willing to fully surrender to God's Spirit. If we fail to love, forgive, crucify our carnal desires, purify our thought life, humble ourselves, or remain detached from our material possessions, can we claim peace with God? Or if we fail to immerse ourselves in God's Word and give ourselves fully to God, is it any wonder that we are weak and sickly? And a great condemnation it would be if God would need to condemn us for influencing others to be weak and sickly.

Dear brethren and sisters, let us not lightly enter into a Communion ser-

vice, but diligently examine ourselves to see if we have the heart of Christ within us. May we surrender ourselves to the Lord's will and live daily within the boundaries of His will. May God help us to daily purify ourselves so that no weak and sickly members would be in our ranks. May we be wholly devoted and thoroughly sanctified followers of the crucified Christ, who can then partake worthily of the cup and bread of His suffering.

Brother Gerald.



ATTITUDES TOWARD AUTHORITY.

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Romans 13:1, 2). While these verses address our response to civil authorities, the principles apply to other authorities as well.

Honor and fear are needed in home and church life as well. We must be subject to each other with mutual love and respect. A fear of God will result in submission to those He has vested with authority and responsibility. This includes wives to husbands, children to parents, employees to employers, pupils to teachers, and church members to leaders (Ephesians 5:21-28 and 6:1-9). Right attitudes are the fount of appropriate responses.

God-ordained authority should be obeyed and greatly appreciated. We benefit much from structured authority. We cannot imagine the disorder and chaos that would result from little or no regulation.

Before we are ready to receive authority, we must learn to obey. God wisely gave man a long childhood under the authority of his parents. Happy is the child who has learned to respect his parents and teachers even though the training includes needful discipline. Nobody is ready to exercise authority until he has learned to submit and follow directions. Parents and teachers must first be good students. Leaders must first learn to be followers. Routine faithfulness provides a pattern for others (Titus 2:7); this is essential to good leadership.

We make it hard for others to show respect if we as leaders are disrespectful. When parents do not show proper respect to schoolteachers or employers or church leaders, their children will likely be disrespectful to them or

to other authority. Showing proper respect can be difficult at times. However, even though a leader has an evident weakness, his position demands that we give due honor. He holds an office that must be recognized.

We should obey "from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered [to us]" (Romans 6:17). The church is right in expecting loyal submission to the consistent application of Scripture. We should not chafe under such authority. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

Those who resist authority sometimes quote the Scripture, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage" (1 Peter 5:3). This usage is certainly wrong. We must rather be disposed to follow our leaders. This does not mean that we follow others blindly. To follow others into apostasy would be foolish. When uncertain, we should pray for clear direction and also counsel with faithful, seasoned brethren. God is pleased and ready to help those who humble themselves.

We also need to have right attitudes toward the authority that God has entrusted to us. The exercise of authority should always be with due humility and consideration for others. "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren" (1 Timothy 5:1). Having authority is not an excuse to be disrespectful. Mutual love and respect are highly essential for good relationships.

A self-willed and power-hungry man misusing authority is like a sharp tool in the hands of a little child. This is obvious in the realm of carnal society. He will hurt not only others but also himself. Problems are bound to result from misused power and authority. Diotrephes was one who loved to have the preeminence (3 John 9). John needed to address this attitude and the problem that it caused. A faithful leader in the church is surely a great blessing to her members, but perverted authority is evil and does much harm.

Jesus corrected His disciples when they began to exalt themselves. He rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and love of recognition (Matthew 23:1-12). He taught that such attitudes bring abasement. For such reasons, the authority to rule must be tempered with humility. Church leaders are to refrain from "being lords over God's heritage" (1 Peter 5:3). Every soul is God's heritage and must be respected.

Patience and maturity must temper the exercise of authority. Some promising young men have been spoiled by being given too much authority too

soon in life. The immature are often weak in their sense of responsibility. For this reason a novice must not be ordained, and some older men may be so classified. A novice needs to grow in his understanding (1 Timothy 3:6). He needs to view added responsibility not as a coveted position but rather as an avenue for service in the church.

One should not attempt to remove others to advance himself. Any glory that one may gain will be very brief. Absalom tried to overthrow his father so that he might reign. This ended in tragedy. He could not possibly have had a glorious reign. In contrast, David is a noble example of respect for authority, especially in relation to King Saul and his evil intentions. David refused to lift his hand against Saul to gain his office. An effort to gain a position by trying to take it from another is terrible and sinful and will be condemned.

A good leader does not try to hold others down but rather attempts to lift them up, perhaps even above himself. To rule should always be seen as a way to serve the cause of the kingdom. This responsibility is shared with others. Leaders must work together to rule and guide.

We must recognize the limits of human authority. Our highest allegiance must be to God and New Testament doctrine. This at times forces us as Christians to disregard civil or human commands that require us to act contrary to God's will. Doing so must be with care and due respect. While we must revere God and sacred things above all else, this is no license for disrespect toward men in authority.

When the king forbade Daniel to pray to God for thirty days, Daniel knelt and prayed to God openly as he did previously. He was loyal to the king but would not yield to his decree. The three Hebrew children would not bow to the king's image, and God saved them from the fiery furnace. But we may need to suffer. Many of our faithful ancestors died for having refused to submit to evil requirements. Our faith in God is tested when we need to obey God rather than men.

May God be glorified as we both submit to and exercise God-given authority.

By the late Amos Rudolph.



Cultural Norms That Press God's People (Part 2)

Disdain for Discipline.

The rest of those waiting in the cash register lineup were clearly annoyed, but the mother seemed not to notice. Her young boy was repeatedly banging the cart into the elderly lady ahead. Finally the elderly lady turned and said, "Could you please control your son?"

"My son does what he wants to do," the mother replied. Something snapped in the man next in line. He grabbed his jug of milk and opened the lid. 'And I do what I want to," he said as he proceeded to dump the milk over the mother's head. Although injustice does not sanction lawlessness, this happening illustrates the extremes of an undisciplined society.

The mottos of our culture seem to be, "I will tolerate no interference in my life; I will do what pleases my senses; I will relax and have a good time; I will have lots of fun." North America caters to these inclinations by offering a multiplicity of restaurants, amusement parks, stadiums, massages, and unceasing ways in which to pamper her citizen's lives. It is inevitable that just as facing difficulty, struggling through hardship, and enduring pain led to the rise of our society, so the inner softness that avoids difficulty and seeks easy, self-indulgent living will bring it down.

The church too will fall if God's people try to escape the disciplined way. Christ said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Self-discipline is a mark of the disciple of Christ.

Parents, we must not allow the world's disdain for corporal punishment to rub off on us. The rod still will "deliver his soul from hell." When our children understand that no means no, when they fear to displease us, and when they obey our commands willingly, we have turned them toward discipleship. Then respect toward other authorities in their lives will not be a hurdle, nor will they think church discipline to be unnatural and brutal. If we can teach them to submissively accept correction, we will have done them a great service.

Fellow Christians, we must discipline ourselves, even in small areas. We should not periodically change jobs, avoid incompatible brethren, carelessly spend our earnings, or leave our projects half-finished to begin others. We need to promptly face difficult tasks, like getting out of bed, avoiding overeating, and disciplining our thought life. God cannot use those who fail to "keep under [their] bodies."

We cannot serve the King and ourselves at the same time. We cannot sit on a massaging recliner with a coffee on a hot pad and our feet in a foot spa, listening to soft background music, and fulfill the Great Commission

simultaneously.

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3).
— Brother Stephen.



PRAYER POINT

*“The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man availeth much”*

Pray that we would follow Moses’ example of choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.
Hebrews 11:25.

Pray that the elderly among us would have strength to be good examples to the rising generation.

Pray that Christ may be the head of the new homes being established.

Thank God for the blessing of religious freedom.

