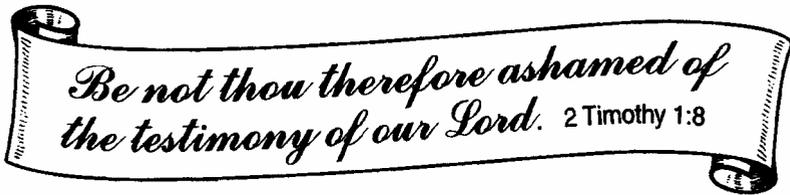


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Perils of Prosperity

For many of us, prosperity has been the norm. We possess many things and have an easy life. Generally, we feel good about prosperity. We may even feel that riches are a result of godliness. After all, were not godly men of old like Abraham and Job also men of wealth? Is it not God who gives us the power to get wealth? Deuteronomy 8:18. And is it not God who gives "us richly all things to enjoy" 1 Timothy 6:17? Yes, but the Bible also warns against riches and prosperity.

The Bible describes riches as uncertain and easily corrupted and cankered. "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). As the rich young ruler turned away, Jesus said, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (Luke 18:24). When a disgruntled man asked Jesus to convince his brother to divide the inheritance, Jesus said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" Luke 12:15. He then proceeded to share the parable of the rich farmer in which he revealed perils of prosperity.

Prosperity can bind and control. The farmer was already affluent. In order to hoard his bumper crop, he decided to tear down his barns (which were likely adequate enough) and build greater. The project was a large undertaking; it also required increased management and maintenance. Along with wealth come increased cares, headaches, worries, and demands. "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?" Ecclesiastes 5:11. The rich farmer became a servant to his things.

Prosperity can capture the heart. The rich man revealed his heart: "There will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." His appreciation for his barns had turned into full-fledged love. The allurements of things can be so subtle but so real, especially when those things seem to be the product of our own ingenuity. If we find that our thinking, talking, and admiration are centered upon things, they may have become an idol. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" Luke 12:34.

Prosperity feeds sensual living. Jesus owned very little. Paul knew how to be abased. John the Baptist ate locusts and wild honey. In contrast, the rich man dreamed of ease, eating, drinking, and merrymaking. And why not? He had plenty of money to indulge himself. Prosperity accelerates fleshly, sensual living. We must beware of this danger and use all our

possessions to the honor and glory of God.

Prosperity deceives fools. God called the rich man a fool. He had opportunities to do good, but rather than responding to those needs, he foolishly built his life around riches. He may have supposed that gain was godliness. Fools "trust in uncertain riches" and therefore make foolish decisions and plans without regard for eternity.

Prosperity is indeed perilous. How can we avoid its perils?

Be content. If we consider ourselves poor (we are rich compared to many of the world), we dare not be covetous. Rather, we are to be content with such things as we have Hebrews 13:5. Remember, we are more capable and valuable than the birds and flowers. Surely God will care for us.

Give liberally. If we have riches, we should not be intimidated by the poverty of this world, but graciously and liberally give as we have opportunity, "ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for [ourselves] a good foundation against the time to come" 1 Timothy 6:18-19. The rich man could have graciously given to the needs of others without building new barns.

Sell out if overtaken. This was God's answer to the rich young ruler: "Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" Matthew 19:21. Will the things that we have collected in life be a peril not only to ourselves but also to our posterity? "And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?" (Ecclesiastes 2:19). We are to be good stewards of our earthly possessions. And may we and our families truly lay up treasure in heaven, Matthew 6:20, lest our labor be wasted.

So, if poor—be content; if rich—give; if overtaken—sell.
—JAS



The Voting Booth

The countdown of another election year continues. Many state and federal elections will be held on November 6. If all goes as planned, on that morning and throughout the workday, many Americans will hurry off to the polling stations across the nation. Americans everywhere will stay tuned to radio briefs and news reports of local and national results as they unfold.

Yet still many Americans will do nothing related to the pending election.

They say, "Why? They are all crooked." By November 7, the entire nation will know the results. Many Americans will wash their hands of the whole process and revert to being sarcastic commentators.

What is your responsibility as a Christian? Are you ready to enter a booth? Every responsible Christian should take an interest in the election. Now you may say, "My kingdom is not of this world," so why should I be involved in the politics of this world?" This question deserves an answer. As Christians, we have a secret booth of prayer, where we must actively engage heaven on the behalf of earthly authorities. "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

"First of all, supplications." For what should we supplicate God in our private booths? Paul suggests the lengthening of lawfulness and tranquility. We desire an atmosphere that protects the good and promotes the Gospel. Undoubtedly, another supplication we must think and say is, "Thy will be done." We do not want any part in anything God is not part of.

"First of all, . . . prayers." What difference is Paul emphasizing between prayers and supplications? Is he just using a row of synonyms? No, the focus now shifts to things like disagreeable legislation. We say, "Prayer changes things." We expect prayer to affect legislation, and it does. As the society we live among continues to morph into further and irreversible socialism, we will have plenty to pray about. Undoubtedly, we will even have to boldly petition the throne of grace to find the help we need to face the challenges before us. Happily, our "voting booth" provides direct access to heaven.

"First of all, . . . intercessions." Have you prayed for President Obama lately? Why or why not? What about Vice-president Biden? These may be career politicians and variously loved or hated by their countrymen, but they are also people like you and me. We have a never-ending duty as Christians to respect, pay, pray, and obey just such men. Is our faith so weak that we cannot see a politician as a candidate not only for office but also for salvation?

"First of all, . . . giving of thanks." What thanks can be given when, because of poor fiscal policies, taxes have risen, tolls have jumped, and fees have multiplied? We are not the picketing sort of people, but do we subtly obstruct civil rule in other ways? Is it possible to "picket" and "give thanks" to God in the same prayer for the same people or person? Not

likely.

We have much to be thankful for! We ought to be very thankful that basic law and order are being maintained. We ought to notice that we are taxed at much lower rates than most other democracies. We ought to notice that our passports still give us easy access to most countries of the world. The "free market" approach, though imperfect, has freed up enough funds and people to allow us to respond to the various "Macedonian" calls we hear today.

Directly or indirectly, these various authorities have contributed to our general welfare and pleasant circumstances. We ought to notice the repeated use of the word all in 1 Timothy 2:1-4. We all have a personal debt of thanks to pay to and for our civil leaders. It could be very different and is for many in other restricted countries.

We must not leave our prayer booths to go to the voting booths. Mennonites have a mixed history on involvement in government. History bears out the confusion of active voting while trying to maintain other nonresistance positions. The Mennonites of Lancaster County endured contempt during the Civil War as feelings mounted ahead of the onset of hostilities. Their peace sect status, their view of slavery, and their view against secession as a form of rebellion were well-known. That alone was enough to stir the disgust of Southern sympathizers, but the fact that some Mennonites had actually voted for Lincoln and Thaddeus Stevens incited even stronger feelings.

Inconsistency again caught Mennonites in World War I. In the History of Mennonites in Virginia (Vol. II), we read this, "If they had voted for Wilson who ran on the slogan 'he kept us out of the war' in '16, and a few had, they were told that Wilson was at war now and that they must fight with him." At the same time in Ontario (for Canada, as a Commonwealth nation, was involved in World War I from the time Great Britain declared war on Germany), the Canadian government decided to deny CO status to applicants if they had a history of voting or any other active influence on government office or policy.

What does this teach us today? Church and state are best kept separate, very separate. While maintaining maximum activity in our prayer booths, we dare not muddy our testimony and position on nonresistance by partial involvement in government, whether local or national.

As citizens of earthly countries, we have much to pray for, many to pray for. We must honor where honor is due. We must render taxes "unto Caesar" regardless of how they may be used. We must obey laws as a

testimony of our appreciation and cooperation whenever it does not conflict with God's law. We must impress the rising generation with the need to respect all in authority. "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour" Romans 13:7.

For us, the qualifications of political candidates is not our primary concern. Will we seek God's will in the election? "Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God" Daniel 6:11.

Can it be said of you, "He kneeled upon his knees ... and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime"?

Brother Michael



ABLE TO "KEEP RANK"

The great warriors who chose to leave Saul and follow David were all able to "keep rank" 1 Chronicles 12:33, 38. They succeeded in warfare because they worked together so well. "They were not of double heart." They would not serve any other than the God of heaven and His cause. And they would not turn back in the day of battle.

Their ability to stay consistently abreast of each other and avoid any breach in their battle line made them formidable foes. If one fell wounded, they closed the gap where the wounded had been, never allowing the enemy to find a way through the ranks. If others turned back, they maintained their position together. They endangered their lives for the sake of unity and collective victory. What a testimony!

A dying father gathered his ten sons about his bed. He asked them to gather ten sticks and bind them into a bundle. He then challenged each son to break the bundle, but they could not. He then took the bundle apart and broke each stick one by one. So it is in church life. Strength is found in staying together. We must unite ourselves together in one faith and practice.

It is unlikely that any of the ten sticks were exactly alike—nor are we. Strength in one compensates for a weakness in another. The Spirit has distributed differing gifts to men in such a way that we can aid each other in spiritual victory. The Holy Spirit blends an odd assortment of people into a unified church that can face the worst enemy if the members "keep rank." How is this done?

We "keep rank" as we take direction together, move ahead together, pull back together, struggle in the fight together, rejoice over victories together, and share losses together, always aiming for that higher ground. We learn from others, accept direction and assistance, help those who are weak, pray for one another, and willingly fill our place.

We "keep rank" by corporately applying the Scriptures, which are relevant to current issues. If we fail to base our battle strategy on the Scriptures, the enemy is crafty and will conquer us. While some issues may appear neither right nor wrong, we must ponder their outcome. But our understanding of the Bible must harmonize with the voice of our fellow soldiers. A testimony of love for the Lord must mesh with submission to the body of Christ in practical life.

We "keep rank" as we balance our vision with waiting on and moving with our brethren's vision. Each member is expected to have a heart in tune with his Commander. But if we consider our relationship with Christ as the only key for victory, we fail to use the strength of the other members that God has provided for our safety. A personal relationship with God will also draw us together to fight shoulder to shoulder with each other.

How may we fail to "keep rank"? If our differing gifts destroy the bond of peace, we are not using them as God directed. God designed each of His workers to fill a special place for Him that would fit into His broader plan, the church. God may call us through the church to a distant region, but He does not expect us to distance ourselves from the church in order to be useful. The work of God moves forward as brethren and sisters unite their gifts together in the church.

We will fail to "keep rank" if we forget that our Lord is the Supreme Commander of the church. To view the church as a human, political organization will stifle personal conviction and hinder the leading of the Spirit.

Times of turmoil in a congregation can cause us to lose our faith in the church. If we take our focus off our Commander, Jesus Christ, and focus instead on our church leadership, we will likely become critical of their work instead of being a soldier for the truth. But God has called us to respect and pray for our leaders. Some become disillusioned and individualistic rather than submitting to a church. "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" 1 Peter 5:5.

How do we remain in rank while working through current issues? Ideally, since there is only one Spirit, we would all understand and support

our church's position on issues. Our opinions must yield to Scriptural consensus. If we choose to contradict the church's position on current issues, we choose to fight the enemy in our own way. We are saying that we know how to deal with this issue better than the larger body. Keeping rank sometimes requires foregoing our own personal feelings and even convictions for the sake of the unity of the church. How much can we be critical and still give God-ordained leadership their proper place?

Satan will use every tactic he can, including dissension in the brotherhood, to undermine the effectiveness of the army of the Lord. While we struggle to form a line of defense, Satan is advancing his war on multiple fronts. These perilous end times require that we analyze our motives carefully. Do we disagree because of a Biblical principle, or is it stubbornness? Would it be wrong to submit to the body? Our way may seem better, but is it the only right way?

Also, if an issue is not our responsibility to resolve, we must be careful that we are not as a fool that "uttereth all his mind" Proverbs 29:11.

May we faithfully serve in our place with our brethren and sisters, so that we may be found faithful when God calls us home to join the ranks in heaven.

Brother Aaron



Blessings of Home (Part 4)

Haven of Harmony

Blithely we sing, "When we all pull together / How happy we'll be." But the sights and sounds of too many homes reveal day-to-day affairs to be a tug of war rather than a tug-together effort. Developing a strong family spirit should be the goal of every family member. Will the mildew of individualism stunt the olive plants "round about thy table"?

Parental teamwork, a result of constant, open communication, lays the groundwork for harmony at home. Children should know that one parent will support the decisions of the other. Answering questions with "Let's see what Mother thinks" or "Did you ask Father?" signals parental unity. Though husbands and wives will not always think alike, they must learn to think together. Discussing their differing opinions or convictions in the presence of children, however, is unwise as it will unsettle children and polarize youth. Sufficient private time must be arranged for comprehensive communication. Strong husband-wife teams are homemade with selfless

love.

Every child longs for the security and acceptance of his family. Parents satisfy that search for significance in numerous ways: sincere commendation for a job exceptionally well done, encouragement to develop their abilities, and invitation to respectfully share their ideas. A balance of praise and reproof will prepare them for secure adult life. The child must also have the security of appropriate discipline for disobedience. Without this interchange, a child is likely to become clamorous, provocative, and defiant as he tries to prove he is someone to be recognized. To keep the family pulling together, parents must have an equal care for each child.

Not all family members need to enjoy the same occupation, but every healthy child should be expected to contribute to the demands of daily living. Projects involving the entire family, whether work or play, give opportunity to exercise the grace of give-and-take. Chore schedules and progress charts help keep order. Neither continual childish complaining nor constant parental chiding is acceptable in a Christian home.

Parents with vision will have some requirements beyond their church's minimum standard of practice. These may potentially disrupt home unity as youth begin to analyze issues and develop personal conviction. The influence of peers is powerful and demands that parents maintain a close connection with the child's social life. Unified parents who consistently practice their convictions and are able to explain the basis and value of them earn a rapport with their children. Patient firmness is more successful than persuasive arguments. Youth who see parents submitting to and supporting church authority find it easier to submit to home authority.

Home life is harmonious as we allow each other room to grow. When your goal is my goal and our goal is God's goal, our symphony rises as sweet music, blessing the world and pleasing our God.

Brother Harold





PRAYER POINT

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

*“Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest,
that he will send forth labourers into his harvest”
(Matthew 9:38).*

*Pray for the Publication Board, that they would continue to produce
literature that strengthens us in the faith.*

Thank God for “the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

*Pray for those recently ordained, that they may “preach the word;
be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke,
exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine”
(2 Timothy 4:2).*

*Pray for those who are afflicted, that they may find sufficient grace
each day and healing according to God's will.*

