



**FROM
THE
DESK OF
PASTOR
HOOD**



Pastor's Page Anthology
Volume 1 — 2000-2005
by Darren W. Hood

Remnant Christian Assembly
Southfield, Michigan

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Editors

Sonia Dewberry
Dimitri Gibson
Angela Hood
Juliana Moore
Patricia Nowling
Tawanna Ward

Church Website: <http://www.remnant.us>
Internet Outreach Website: <http://www.cybersaint.org>
Follow Pastor Hood on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/bishophood>

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My Desire, Your Desire

I've been pastoring now for almost 2-1/2 years. I have been operating under a pastoral grace for many, many years beyond that. I know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that a pastor's main job is to help the sheep reach God's destination for them — safely.

To accomplish this task, I embrace accurate teaching and faithful delivery of God's word, being available for fellowship, facilitation of services, extending hospitality, providing access to exhortational writings, praying for people as often as God leads and making myself available to the people of God under my care as needed.

The sentiment of my heart is reflected by the apostle John. Third John 4 states, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." I do everything that I can to see this fulfilled in those around me. Greater yet, my heart's desire is to be a blessing (in God's sight) to everyone I come in contact with.

With all of the people I encounter, nobody has a greater place in my heart than the people who attend Remnant Christian Assembly. The pinnacle of my "call to care" resides upon you. For this reason and because of some things I perceive through the Lord, I deliver the following exhortations:

- Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall...
- Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.
- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.
- ...Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.
- For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Diligence, steadfastness, dedication to purpose, wisdom, embracing of God's word, corporate fellowship, humility, order and soberness are all elements that are required for success in God. That which one will reap if he/she sows according to the above-mentioned passages is obvious. The operative question is . . . what will you do about it? What will be your response?

The table is truly spread. Help is available. Many have been guilty of slackness, not bearing fruit to the above-mentioned scriptures. The challenge and more direct question, then, is this . . . In 2002, what is **your desire** and what will **you** do with the opportunity set before you?

When Things Don't Go Your Way

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. (Philippians 4:11)

Do things always go your way? Absolutely not!!! There isn't a person — EVER — on the face of the earth who has such a testimony. Even Jesus asked that the cup of the crucifixion would pass from Him (and submitted to the will of the Father). Since things “not going our way” is, hence, an absolute, it is critical for us to continuously remind ourselves of this truth AND be constructive regarding WHAT to do when things don't go our way.

Consider the children of Israel. First Corinthians 10:9-11 says:

Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

There were several times when the children of Israel encountered situations when things didn't quite go their way. They were confronted by hardship, lack, distresses, and necessities. Their responses left much to be desired, ending up on record for us as examples of how NOT to carry ourselves. When they were without water, they complained. When they became bored with manna (a type of God's provision), they complained. When their friends were judged by God, they rebelled.

Exodus 13:17-18 provides us with some insight regarding the “ways” of the Lord. It says, “And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt.” The Red Sea was actually the BEST situation (considering the circumstances). This scenario eventually (and unfortunately) resulted in complaining, crying, and lost confidence. Each of these responses is incorrect and inappropriate.

God is calling for us to be wiser than our predecessors. He is calling for us to: 1) Know God's ways and 2) Learn to be content in each situation. Things are much better than they appear. All-in-all, if we focus on learning to be content in every situation, when things don't go YOUR WAY, it won't matter.

I don't want things to go MY way . . . as much as I want things to go GOD'S WAY. As long as things go GOD'S WAY, there's nothing to complain about . . . is there? :-)

It's Never About What It's About

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.... (1 Peter 1:6-7)

There's always one interesting issue that's a part of every trial that we experience . . .

OUR POINT OF FOCUS!!!!

Every trial that we go through for the sake of the gospel is meant to accomplish one thing — to turn our focus from earthly things to the things of the Lord. If our focus is predominantly on heavenly and spiritual things, we maintain our level of operation in God. If we allow the things that we go through to change our focus, we begin to operate in carnal mode and sacrifice our blessedness. Consider these verses from John 12:25 and Matthew 16:25:

He that loveth his life shall lose it;
and he that hateth his life in this world
shall keep it unto life eternal.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and
whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find
it.

Do you realize what it means . . . to love your life? Do you realize what it means . . . to save your life? Our life, essentially, is of the world. It consists of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. This was the basis of our operation before we came to the Lord. It was our . . . point of focus. Everything we did revolved around those three things.

Those who truly come to Christ undergo a “focal shift”. We are no longer servants of those elements, but our focal point is of Christ. The challenge, however, is to be renewed in the spirit of our minds so that we can mature and learn to maintain focus on the things of God. Because our focal point is critical to our success (determining how we operate AND where we're going) the goal of the enemy is to impact this part of our heart. Considering these truths, our trials start to “make more sense” from the perspective that we understand that **our trials are never about what they're really about!!!** Consider the following examples:

- The death of Job's children, loss of cattle, failed integrity of his wife, and sickness was not about any of those things. All of those things were meant to change his point of focus, curse God, and die.
- The fiery furnace and the lions den were supposed to shake the confidence and focus of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.
- The beating, the torture, and the taunting of Jesus during His last hours were targeted at discrediting Him AND changing His focus — especially the charge of the hecklers to “save yourself and come down from the cross”.

When subjected to various trials, the enemy tries to get us to become “over-focused” on our situation (i.e., distracted), resulting in protest, a “pity party”, or a foolish attempt to “save ourselves” from the dilemma. We're not called to save ourselves. We're called to bear the cross. In order to bear the cross successfully, we must FIRST deny ourselves (i.e., lose our life) — something that the vast majority of professing Christians have yet to do. In so doing, we'll see our challenges for what they really are.

God Gives Cookies

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. (Mark 11:24)

As I was praying this morning, I asked the Lord to bless someone and to “impact them”. Immediately, the Lord reminded me of something that we talked about recently and then impressed upon me the need to remind the congregation as well. The message to remember? One word.

C O O K I E S

I’ll explain. I recently shared a word with the congregation that I actually heard while listening to the radio and the Lord also added to it. In addition, someone in the congregation shared an excellent word of wisdom about what happens when we pray — a word we MUST remember in order to be sober and realistic about prayer. Many times, when we ask God for something or to do something, we fail to realize what He is actually going to do. Our mindset is usually just as if we are buying something out of a catalog. We see (conceptualize) what we want, place the order (present the prayer request) and then we expect to receive exactly what we ordered (or prayed for). If we don’t receive the exact thing we ordered (or prayed for), we want to send it back and/or complain.

Remember, 1 John 5:14-15 says, “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” Put that together with Mark 11:24 and we see two major qualifiers of prayer. We need to know God’s will, fuel our confidence with it and present our requests to Him. We must also remember, however, that though we will receive that which is properly requested and qualified before the Lord, IT DOES NOT COME “PACKAGED” LIKE AN ITEM IN A CATALOG!!! When we receive from the Lord, many, many times, the response, impact or move of God comes in a form similar to ingredients in a cookie. One day you’ll get the milk. Another day you’ll get the eggs. On another day, vanilla extract, and so on.

God gives cookies. Remember that and be patient.

Ignorance - The Inexcusable Excuse

But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.... (Luke 12:48)

Ignorance. It's a state of vulnerability. All week, I've been down memory lane and experiencing new examples of people claiming "I didn't know" (ignorance) as an excuse for doing or not doing a particular thing. The claim of "I didn't know" is usually given with a sense of closure. Most people, including Christians, think that "not knowing" is a justifiable excuse for not doing what should be done in a given situation. What those who claim "ignorance" as an excuse fail to realize is that not knowing is only a part of such a matter. Just as with sin, where the greater issue is the "why" (the status of the heart — whether you were overcome or whether you embrace the sin in your heart), the same applies with ignorance. In other words, God's concern is the REASON THAT A PERSON DIDN'T KNOW. The thing that was done or not done in a given situation has a degree of criticality associated with it. That's why a person will be addressed about their actions (or non-actions). Consider some of these reasons why a person "didn't know":

- **Nobody Told Them (Personal-level):** This is the most excusable "I didn't know" scenario (usually fully excusable). This one speaks to our need to communicate. If a person didn't know because someone should have told them, the failure to communicate is revealed as the root of the problem.
- **I Forgot:** While forgetfulness can be excused, at times, the Bible reveals that forgetfulness can result from lack of exposure to the issue-at-hand or, accordingly, failure to keep the issue-at-hand at the forefront of your mind/agenda. The reason why the bout of forgetfulness took place confirms whether or not the act was worthy of rebuke (and an issue of righteousness).
- **Didn't Care (or Haphazard Handling):** This one is very close to "I Forgot" (as the person was informed, but wasn't a good steward of the information received — in some cases, failing to ascribe the proper level of importance to the info received). While they won't tell you, some folks don't remember because they didn't care in the first place. If you should have cared, God has an issue with your lack of concern (which constitutes a failure to love properly), thereby making this an issue of righteousness.
- **Poor Discernment/Perception:** This is the big one. This one can even be at the root of "nobody told them", because while someone may not tell you about a given thing, there are many times that God fills the gap and tells you Himself. When God tells you and convicts you about something you should or shouldn't do, you're responsible and can't claim ignorance as an excuse. Just before we do or don't do certain things, God will warn or inform us so that we can do the right things. God desires that we be sharp spiritually so that we can recognize His funneling of information in such matters.

Bottom-line? Ignorance doesn't guarantee one being excused. In Luke 12:48, even the person who "didn't know" was beaten. The best way to approach this matter? Let's strive to be INFORMED. Information and sharp discernment is available to those who seek it — by way of the Lord Jesus Christ. This way, ignorance becomes a non-issue.

Glory

For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. (1 Corinthians 11:7)

But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. (1 Corinthians 11:15)

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

What is glory? According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, as a verb (to glory), it means “to rejoice proudly — used with in”. As a noun, it means “something that secures praise or renown” or “a distinguished quality or asset”. The Strong’s definition adds a little twist and is more accurate, of course, for Bible study — to see what GOD means when He uses the word. In 1 Corinthians 11:7 and 11:15, it refers to “something worthy to be thought of as high in value and great dignity”. In 2 Corinthians 11:30 and 12:9, it means “to vaunt or boast”. Jeremiah’s usage is basically the same. There, “glory” means “to make a show, to boast, to rave or celebrate”.

While glorying in something can be either proper or improper, depending upon the object or issue, the above-mentioned passages let us know what we should glory about (and some things we shouldn’t). A man SHOULD glory about his woman (wife). She is a glory unto him. A woman with long hair has every right to be happy about it. It’s a glory unto her. Wise men SHOULD NOT glory about their wisdom. Mighty men SHOULD NOT glory in their might. Rich men SHOULD NOT glory about their riches. We SHOULD, however, glory (be excited, rave and celebrate) when we know the Lord. To know and understand Him is the most exciting thing that can happen in this world.

Lastly, in 2 Corinthians 12:9, Paul speaks about glorifying in his infirmities (hardships and trials) — not because they’re exciting and fun, but out of recognition for what takes place during those times — that the power of Christ may rest upon him. Saints, be careful what you glory in.

Your Disposition

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. (Romans 8:5)

In frequently talking about and identifying the issue of sin or the act of sin, what many people fail to remember is that true focus should not be on sin. It should be, rather, on disposition. Do you know what a disposition is? Just in case you don't, Webster offers some clarity. Consider the following definitions:

1. Prevailing tendency, mood, or inclination.
2. Temperamental makeup.
3. The tendency of something or someone to act in a certain manner under given circumstances.

Consider trees. Remember Jesus' statement — that a tree is known by its fruit? This is a call to discernment. A tree is known by the fruit it bears . . . based on its disposition. We're not talking apple/apple tree or orange/orange tree. We're talking good/bad. If a tree's disposition is to bear good fruit, then it's a good tree. If a tree's disposition is to bear evil fruit, then it's a bad tree.

Want more scriptural clarity? First John 3:9-10 says, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." The word "commit" has to do with one's disposition. A person's ability to hear the word of God (on an ongoing basis — John 8:48) and understand what is heard is a disposition. Likewise, Romans 8:5 and its surrounding verses are dealing with disposition.

Romans 8:5 lets us know that those that are after the flesh do mind (i.e., are disposed to do) things according to the flesh. Those that are after the Spirit are disposed to do the things of the Spirit. Romans 6:16 lets us know that people yield to the entity that they serve — as a disposition.

Operative question: What's your disposition?

The Pastor's Directives

The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. (Ecclesiastes 12:11)

Recently, one of the things we discussed was military ranks as it relates to the church. Why is this relevant? Because the people of God are referred to several times as soldiers. Several warfare metaphors appear in scripture. In addition, the inference of military order also appears.

The pastor, as far as the people in the congregation are concerned (and people that don't attend the church for that matter) holds the rank of Staff Sergeant First Class — at the least. The directive, therefore to “obey them that have the rule over you” should, in the minds of a church's attendees, be responded to as a military command. Yes, the other related concepts should be followed as well. Namely, these two:

1. Consider the end of the leader's manner of life
2. Know them that labor among you

Why is the pastor only the Staff Sergeant First Class? Because he is taking orders from someone else. If a pastor is under a bishop, that bishop fulfills the role of a Master Sergeant. Who is the Chief Sergeant Master? Why, Jesus, of course? Everyone gives accountability to Him — the **“one shepherd”** from which the “words” proceed.

Because of this order, for the church to be blessed, all “soldiers” must follow chains of command. That being said, it is critical for all church attendees to realize that order flows downward. When “lower ranking officers” give orders to “higher ranking officers” there is a problem. Disorder is alive in such a congregation and that “leaven” leavens the whole lump (church).

Therefore, when certain things are said to the pastor that don't appear to be taken into consideration, don't assume that your statements are being ignored and don't take it personally. The pastor is hearing what was said and processing the information based on the wisdom of his Superior Officer. If you are foolish enough to give your superior officer a command (an act of insubordination), something else is afoot, isn't it? Be blessed in church operation by recognizing . . . the pastor's directives.

Discernment & Arrogance

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.
(Hebrews 5:14)

Continuing with the recent theme of “order”, one of the things at the forefront of my mind is the level of arrogance exhibited by people in and around the church.

Consider Hebrews 5:14. I believe the word of God. How about you? It says that “strong meat” belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Interesting, huh? Let’s list these key points:

- Strong meat belongs to those of “full age”.
- Those of “full age” are identified by a “developed sense of discernment”.
- This development of discernment comes, over time, through “exercise”.
- No “reason to use” results in . . . no exercise or development.
- The main focus of discernment is “the ability to properly identify good and evil”.

Now that this point is clear, it will help you see what the Lord is expressing — especially with all the misdirected definitions and teachings on discernment. It’s extremely odd that many people claim to have “discernment” and/or “discernment of spirits”, yet the same people have such an extreme lack of ability to do the right things and properly identify that which is good and that which is evil. In addition, these same people (many times) because of their “lack of opportunities” (due to either the failure to dedicate themselves or just because they haven’t been born again long enough) these folks DON’T HAVE DEVELOPED SENSES! Ironically, these “underdeveloped people” are just like the people in Hosea — people that strive with the priest. These uninformed people argue, contend and are completely variant in their attitudes and are insubordinate in their hearts and minds.

Folks, this is an epidemic and it is rampant in the church. It is an epidemic of . . . ARROGANCE!!! What is arrogance? It can be defined as “unjustifiable confidence”. An uninformed, undedicated, underdeveloped, unstable, movable, lazy person has absolutely no just cause to be confident in Christ.

Don’t suffer with this disease. In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence. In the fear of the Lord, your discernment will be developed and healthy. In the fear of the Lord, there is order. Only then will you overcome the “plague of the brute beast” and we all will be able to rest with one another. After all, we must remember that one sinner destroyeth much good.

Looking Up (Focus)

In this age of “we fall down” and “nobody’s perfect”, many fail to see an underlying tone that supports the scriptures OR is supported by the scriptures. What tone is that? It’s one that always calls us to LOOK UP!

What do I mean? James 5:17 says, “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.” The first part of this verse highlights my point. Elias (Elijah) was human, just like us. Because everyone in the scriptures is of the same ilk, we can apply this “characteristic” to them as well.

- Paul was human.
- Peter was human.
- Matthew was human.
- Mark was human.
- Luke was human.
- John was human.
- James was human.

These seven individuals had several things in common, but there are two, besides being human, that are key: 1) they are all New Testament believers and 2) they are the writers of the New Testament, through the Holy Ghost of course. These seven writers epitomize the sentiment of Ephesians 4’s statement about the purpose of leadership — that God gave leadership for our education, edification and the promotion of unity and stability, to name a few.

In the writings of each, even though all are human and all are, therefore, faced with challenges, frailties, stumblingblocks and issues JUST LIKE US, they don’t write about things that many today write, sing and talk about. They don’t talk about “falling down”. They don’t talk about how frail we are. They don’t talk about not being perfect. They talk about how to stand. They talk about how we can do all things through Christ and how strength is made perfect in weakness. They talk about the call to perfection and its importance. For the purpose of this discourse, let’s refer to this correct FOCUS as LOOKING UP!

What is the underlying tone, therefore, of the scriptures? It is that in all things, we should always LOOK UP! Our focus is to look up — unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Our focus, even though we’re human, is being like Christ — presenting our bodies a living sacrifice and striving to walk as He walked (1 John 2:6).

Beware the prophet that encourages you to look down.

Ministering To Yourself

For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:31-32)

God gave us gifts . . . in the form of godly leadership. While we have been given leadership, there yet remains another job that the pastor/leader cannot do. The pastor/leader CANNOT force obedience upon anyone. That being said, the operative question is . . .

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT TO HELP YOU BE OBEDIENT?

Take a look in the mirror and you'll get an answer to your question. While, as a pastor, I minister to others by feeding with knowledge and understanding, I must also minister to myself in a different way — by examining, scrutinizing, and exercising discipline with myself, in response to the Holy Ghost and the word of God, as needed. You have the same “personal” responsibility.

The call to minister to oneself is replete in scripture. 2 Timothy 2:21 challenges us to “purge ourselves” so we can be a vessel unto honour. First Corinthians 9:27 speaks of “keeping under one’s body and bringing it unto subjection”. Second Corinthians 13:5 speaks of “examining yourself whether ye be in the faith”. Matthew 11:27-28 speaks of “taking Jesus’ yoke and learning of Him”. James 1:12 speaks of “enduring temptation”. Lastly, 1 Corinthians 11:31 speaks of “judging ourselves”. Each one of the aforementioned commands and challenges is a type of ministering to oneself. Yes, again, while the pastor or leader ministers to the people, each person named by the name of Christ MUST ACTUALLY MINISTER TO THEMSELVES AND EXPERIENCE VICTORY AND SUCCESS BY APPLYING WHAT THEY HEAR. We hear when we sit in a ministerial session. We hear when we read and study. We hear when we pray (during or afterwards). How we respond to what we hear involves “personal ministry”.

I challenge each of you today to ask God for wisdom on how to minister to yourself. What can you expect? God will, first, give you wisdom. You'll begin to recognize and address your spiritual needs more effectively. You'll recognize and address your needs BEFORE they become an issue or a problem. Your appreciation for instruction and chastisement will increase/sharpen. You'll “check yourself” BEFORE someone else does (because of the help provided by the Holy Ghost). The person that ministers (properly) to themselves will always steer themselves into the proper path.

Are you ready to judge and minister to yourself . . . the way that God intended? I hope so. If not, God has a backup plan, but it won't be pretty.

Rebuke . . . It's Not Personal

Why all the concern about being rebuked? Why do some people hate it so? Even people with pure hearts struggle with rebuke at times. Why? Because they, like some scorners do, have a tendency to take it personally. Don't.

Rebuke is to be embraced. It is to be treasured — not because of what happens during the event, but because of what it is designed to result in for those that receive it. Consider the following scriptures:

- (Proverbs 15:12) A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.
- (Proverbs 27:5-6) Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.
- (Ecclesiastes 7:3-5) Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.
- (Luke 17:3-4) Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.
- (Revelation 3:17-19) Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Again, what is rebuke? Consider this definition from the Semantic Domains dictionary: “rebuke, expose; refute, show one’s fault, implying that there is convincing of that fault.” When God shows us our faults, it’s not to condemn us. God shows us our faults so that we can be made aware of them. God shows us our faults so that we can take action. God shows us our faults so that we can recover ourselves out of the snare of the devil. Proverbs 15:31 says, “The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.” Therefore, God shows us our faults so that we can abide in His blessings — in the secret place of the Most High.

In closing, consider this example. In Matthew 16:23, Jesus rebuked Peter, saying, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” Tell me, was Jesus’ action personal or was it for Peter’s benefit? Get the picture? Strive to have enough faith in God so that you can receive the word of God when corrected. Please understand that rebuke is, contrary to popular belief, an act of love. The well-being of your soul depends on it. Without it, the enemy would triumph over us. Don’t be deceived. It’s not personal.

Who's Stupid???

But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? (Luke 22:48-49)

It's an interesting thing . . . the perception that some people have of anointed leaders. Most specifically, I'm shocked at some of the things that people do and say to and around me and other sent leaders. I'm completely convinced that some people must just think that I'm stupid.

Strangely, I think that there are two causative points regarding this "problem":

1. The glut of leaders seen by most ARE stupid, so people have an ingrained mindset towards leaders, seeing them as not being too bright.
2. People think that leaders are stupid because of their response (or lack thereof).

Take Jesus, for example, contrasting His operation with the works and heart of Judas Iscariot:

- Judas was a thief. Yet, we have nothing on record stating that Jesus made direct efforts to confront, reprove and correct. The mere fact that Judas was in the midst and hearing detailed ministry was enough.
- Judas pursued his agenda right in the midst of Jesus and the disciples, complaining about the ointment used by the penitent woman to wash Jesus' feet (see John 12). He was in the very presence of God, but had no remorse, no shame and no conviction.
- When Jesus made the declaration that "one of you shall betray me", they all inquired regarding who it was. Judas knew that he was the one, yet, he appeared to participate in this act of self-examination also. In truth, he was deceiving himself and was willing to do so.
- According to Matthew 26:16, Judas sought opportunity to betray Jesus. He was also referred to in Luke 6:16 as a traitor. A traitor is a person that operates based on treachery — they are (for no justifiable and meritorious reason) willing to violate the faith and confidence that you place in them, especially when doing so for their own personal gain and advancement.
- Judas' heart was so corrupt that he was willing to enter into covenant with and receive reward from people that hated and wanted to kill Jesus. Isaiah 1:23 says, "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them."
- Lastly, Judas actually carried out the final act of his betrayal with an act of affection — by kissing Jesus. This was hypocrisy personified.

Because Jesus wasn't directly responding to Judas' behavior and works, because Jesus wasn't making an issue of Judas' stealing, because Jesus wasn't showing blatant signs of suspicion, Judas thought he was "getting away with murder", so to speak. He apparently thought that Jesus was stupid. It goes without saying that we all disagree with Judas' assumption.

The operative question is this — who was/is really the stupid one? In accordance, I challenge you today. Are you drawing conclusions and making assumptions because of my response (or lack thereof)? Are you committing acts of unbelief, disobedience and betrayal, thinking that you're "getting away with something"? Do you really think that your thoughts, actions, purposes, intentions and agenda are a secret??? Silence does not indicate consent or ignorance. Don't you realize that God is always providing information about your heart to those responsible for dealing with such things? All these things considered . . . **WHO'S STUPID???**

His Blood Cleanseth Us

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

As I was leaving the office supplies store yesterday, I noticed that one of my fingernails was a little jagged. I didn't want to nick my nose or snag my clothes so I tried to remove part of the nail. Unfortunately, I failed to remove the nail smoothly. I took the nail down all the way to my skin. It hurt, of course, but that's not what got my attention. I took notice of how the blood rushed to the open area immediately. That's when the word of the Lord came.

Any time there is a threat to the body, the blood moves, immediately, and works to eliminate the problem and the threat, restoring wholeness. Just as the blood works in the human body, so also does the blood of Jesus Christ cleanse from all sin (on a regular basis) - for those that walk in the light - eliminating any and all threats and bringing about wholeness.

This is the same process that John spoke of in 1 John 1:7. If we walk in the light as He is in the light (commit to holiness, present our body a living sacrifice, and take Jesus' yoke and learn of Him), we'll be able to fellowship with one another. In addition, found in this state of being, the blood of Jesus Christ will (automatically) CLEANSE US FROM ALL SIN!!! NOT SOME. ALL!!! Think about the blood of Jesus. It doesn't just cleanse us from sin as we get saved. It cleanses us from sin while we are saved, IF WE WALK IN THE LIGHT AS HE IS IN THE LIGHT. Lots of church folk are "walking in A light", but they're not "walking in THE light" (as He is in the light). Those who walk in another light, will not receive the benefit of ongoing cleansing.

As the pain from the poorly removed fingernail continued to settle down, I thought on these principles. The Lord wasn't done though. He also brought to mind the fact that BLOOD DOES ITS JOB WITH EXTREME PREJUDICE. In other words, blood wastes no time and is intolerant to anything that is a threat. It is totally committed to our well-being. If human blood does that, the blood of Christ is greater.

Do you want the benefits of ongoing cleansing from sin? Are you walking in the light? If so, which light is it? God will do His part. Make sure that you do yours. Make sure that you are walking in the light of Jesus Christ so that you will be found blameless (and cleansed) before Him.

Quick Believers

Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? (Luke 24:25-26)

With all the talk about faith these days, we must be careful not to downplay the role that faith plays in our lives and its requirement for those that stand before the Lord. What we must do, however, is make sure that we have “unfeigned faith” — that we have the type of faith that the Lord presents in the scriptures.

- “Faith” is not just “confidence”, as some people would have us to believe. Hebrews 11:1 says “Now faith is the substance (foundation) of things hoped for, the evidence (full, undeniable proof) of things not seen.”
- Definitions include: a) Persuasion/Persuaded; b) Moral conviction (conviction of the truth); c) constancy of a profession and d) the state of complete dependability.
- Hebrews 11 lets us know that “without faith it is impossible to please God”. This lets us know that the MAIN impact of faith is not regarding “receiving from”, but “pleasing God”. I should want to have faith because it will help me to please God — the main goal in the life of a servant/believer.

By faith, Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain. By faith, Noah constructed an ark (based on things that had never been seen before). By faith, Abraham went on a journey, but didn't know where he was going. Through faith, Sarah received strength to conceive a child, even though she was “past years”. By faith, Moses (when he reached a certain age) refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. By faith, Moses chose rather to endure afflictions with the people of God than to enjoy the riches and honor of Egypt. By faith, Moses forsook Pharaoh and did not fear his wrath. By faith, kings and judges subdued kingdoms, Daniel stopped the mouths of hungry lions, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego quenched the violence of fire, Samson received strength again out of his weakness and Isaiah was placed in a tree trunk and sawed in half. People have accomplished and continue to accomplish many things through faith. Most importantly, people are pleasing God through their faith.

There's one aspect of faith, however, that NEVER seems to get mentioned — quick faith. What's quick faith? Well, in Luke 24:45, Jesus reproves some of his disciples calling them “slow of heart to believe”. The word slow means “dull, sluggish or dilatory”. “Dilatory” means “characterized by procrastination” or “tending to cause delay” — “tardy”, if you will. Not only are we called to have faith. We're called to be . . . QUICK about it.

The question is not “do you believe”. It's “how fast do you believe”? When you hear God's words, how long does it take for you to respond? We are called to be quick believers. When you hear His voice, don't harden your heart.

Don't Believe the Hype!!!

Many people in Christendom are victims of ministerial hype (i.e., they are bewitched). Want to examine yourself and see whether **YOU** are a victim of false Christianity? Consider these frequent examples of deception:

- **Deliverance:** There is no such thing as “deliverance ministry”. Check your Bible. While the word “deliverance” appears (and is used by people to justify what they’re doing), it’s never mentioned, discussed or handled in the same manner that people are doing it today. Want to be delivered? Deliverance is a “built-in component” of salvation. A bunch of people are running around trying to get deliverance because . . . they’re not saved (or aren’t walking in the truth — eventually they won’t be saved). Ever noticed why the same people are always trying to “get deliverance”. Proverbs 28:26 says, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.” Proverbs 11:6 says, “The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness.” Those who are truly saved ARE already delivered. Whether they’re walking in the deliverance God has given is another story.
- **Purging:** Speaking of deliverance, the doctrine of “purging” that’s being presented to many is false. God doesn’t purge people by making them foam at the mouth and vomiting in wastepaper baskets. He purges His children through the word of God and through trials. Want to be clean? Psalm 119:9 says, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.” Interestingly, fake Christians can’t and won’t take heed to God’s word. Hence, they’ll never be cleansed (no matter how many times they throw up).
- **Slain in the Spirit:** Isn’t it strange that people gravitate heavily to things/examples that don’t appear in scripture — EVER!?!?! There is no such thing as being “slain in the Spirit”. If people would be as concerned about “walking in the Spirit” as they are about being “slain in the Spirit”, we’d all be better off.
- **Prosperity:** Money cometh? Yeah. If you “goeth to work!!!” The word “prosper” simply refers to success. It is not synonymous with “rich”. Many believe that God wants us rich and labor to bring this status about. Proverbs 23:4-5 says, “Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.” God is not concerned about us being “financially” rich, but He is concerned about us being “spiritually” rich. He’s so concerned that He has given us everything we need to be “rich in the Spirit”. If, then, a Christian is not rich in the Spirit, it is either because they just got saved OR they’re not walking according to God’s plan.
- **Numerology:** Do you know what this is? It is defined as the occult significance of numbers. In other words, belief that a certain number means a certain thing is an occult practice. In the church, many believe that 7 means one thing, 40 means something and 3 represents something else. This act is akin to full blown numerology. Know what 7 means? It means 7 and not 6 or 8 or 32, for that matter. It does not represent perfection as some teach. Take Naaman the leper for example. He was instructed to dip in Jordan 7 times. If he dips 6, he’s disobedient and doesn’t receive healing. Don’t get spooky on God. He certainly isn’t spooky.

Proximity (and Heart) of the Disciples

And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. (Acts 14:19)

As we spent time this week reviewing passages of scripture that make up Paul's testimony, several thoughts seized my attention. One, however, was impressed upon me to share with you in the Pastor's Page today. It involved the support structure that Paul was surrounded with during his ministry.

In Acts 14, we see some of Paul's earliest plights and challenges — most notably, we see the opposition and the hatred that he was faced with while doing ministry. Was Paul oblivious to these challenges? Absolutely not. In Acts 9:15-16, we see Jesus (yes, Jesus) telling Ananias:

...Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Paul was fully aware of the sufferings he would encounter as a minister and as a Christian. He also spent time encouraging people, constantly, and reminding them (and us) that we, through much tribulation, would enter the kingdom of God.

While tribulation and persecution (2 Timothy 3:12) is a given for the true believer, one element that's missed is our need for support — from one another — to help us get through such pressures. Acts 14:19, our highlighted verse for the moment, tells us how the Jews (most likely the Pharisees) came from Antioch and, as they did many times, stirred up the hearts of the people against Paul and the disciples. The result? They stoned him and left him for dead.

Many of them thought that was “the end of the story”, but God wasn't done. Paul was in a state which required support. He couldn't do for himself at that time. Note what happens in verse 20. It says:

Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch....

Do you see what happened? As the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city. While many people look at those in leadership and see them/us as being on a “higher level”, the truth is that we function as a team. Everybody needs help at some time. The question is . . . Will your proximity, awareness, and heart put you in a position to help? Because someone was in the right place, at the right time, with the right knowledge, and with the right heart . . . someone left for dead is alive, thriving, and victorious in Christ. Selah.

Smelling Silk

For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:16)

This past week, a group was conversing at work about shopping and clothes. During the conversation, I discussed how pleased I was with certain men's clothing stores and how they conducted business. I mentioned one store's commitment to moving merchandise and the great sales they have, some of which are private. Someone then asked me to keep them informed about the sales, so I told them about the current one.

As we discussed one of my favorite stores, someone complimented me on the way I dress and I responded by discussing my favorite kind of shirt to wear — the mock turtleneck. I mentioned that silk versions of these shirts were currently on sale, but that I wouldn't buy any because I didn't like the smell of silk.

My statement about silk became the source of a little controversy. Three-to-four people were in the initial conversation, but when I talked about the smell of silk, a few more people chimed in. Many responded as if they didn't believe what I said AND as if what I said was impossible and crazy.

The "spirit of unbelief" manifested during this exchanges was so strong that I was encouraged to do a little research to validate what I knew to be true. My findings were interesting. Here's what I learned:

- At least some forms of silk have a distinctive smell.
- Some manufacturers produce "fake silk", made from plastic. It doesn't have the "silk smell".
- Everyone doesn't have the ability to smell silk.

While I confirmed and learned various points about silk, I noticed a parallel worth sharing. The last point — everyone can't smell silk — struck me, becoming the point that the Lord used to touch my heart and laying the foundation for this Pastor's Page.

It turns out that "smelling silk" is a direct parallel to the discernment of spiritual things. First Corinthians 2:14-16 says, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

Just as some people cannot smell silk, there are also many who cannot understand, receive, and/or appreciate the things of God. When we discuss what we know for a fact to be true around those without "certain abilities", they will think that what we're saying is foolish — all without confirming their conclusions about our perceptions. If we're not careful, we'll listen to their contradictions and begin to question what we know to be true. Those who receive their flawed witness, can lose their crown.

God, however, is calling for something greater from us. In John 12:36, Jesus exhorts us saying, "While ye have light, believe in the light that ye may be the children of light." In other words, hold fast to that which God reveals and proves to you. Remember, those who have the mind of Christ can think like Him, value what He values, receive what He says, and see what He sees.

That being said can you smell silk? :-)

The Validation of Astonishment

Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. (Ezra 9:4)

Before I address today's topic, I need to present the first four verses from Ezra 9 in their entirety. Ezra 9:1-4 reads as follows:

Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass. And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

For those that haven't already figured it out, the word "astonied" is pronounced and spelled differently today. We now used the word "astonished". What does it mean? The word "astonished" means: 1) to stun; 2) to stupefy or 3) to be devastated (mentally). The Semantic Domains Dictionary provides much greater detail, defining it as "having an emotion or attitude of horror and great fear, implying also dismay and discouragement". It also defines "being astonished" as "being appalled".

In this day of great apostasy, the ability to identify those that are of the truth is critical. Today's Pastor's Page is being used to present a basic point about the heart of a true believer (as well as that of a true leader) — to help everyone who reads this to come into the knowledge of, to remind, or to help crystallize a point-of-identification that is rarely mentioned — the fruit of astonishment (also known as "vexation").

As depicted in Ezra 9, we see a leader who has been exalted during a time of restoration among God's people. The Lord God has stirred the heart of a heathen king to decree and help the Jewish people rebuild their land. The 70-year captivity is coming to an end. As the work nears its end, God begins to reestablish order of His house, raising up Ezra (a descendant) to resume teaching of God's word to the people — restoring a practice that had been shunned, leading to the captivity in the first place. As God presents the state of the people to Ezra, he reflects the heart presented in today's exhortation. In seeing and hearing of Israel's "internal state", Ezra becomes "astonied". He is appalled about the current condition and practices, assembles himself with others who "trembled at God's word", seeks the Lord in prayer and confession, and leads a charge of repentance.

When things are not right, astonishment (i.e., being appalled) serves as the catalyst and foundation for proper actions. Such a response to error can only, however, be manifested in the life of someone with a pure heart. The wicked see such things, but pass on (making light of the error) and are punished. The operative question today is . . . What do you see (in Christendom) and what is your response? A truly healthy heart can only be . . . astonished.

Thank God for “Taking Us Up”

*When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.
(Psalm 27:10)*

The topic of parenting — specifically, the things we missed while growing up — has been a constant point-of-focus in some of our fellowship this week. As I thought upon what to share in this week’s Pastor’s Page, I was reminded of the fact that only a few people were part of these conversations and unctoned to share some critical points.

First, let me present for your consideration Psalm 27:10 (above). In this passage, David mentions a couple of elements that we need to pay careful attention to (or else we’ll miss the message):

- He said “when” mother and father forsake, not “if”. Folks, even the best of parents neglects to perform certain duties and tasks that God would have them/you/us do.
- Next, consider the word “forsake”. According to the Strong’s Lexicon, in the Hebrew, it means “to leave, abandon, forsake, neglect, or apostatise.” It also means “to let loose, set free, let go, free”. While the words “abandon”, “forsake”, “leave”, and “neglect” may strike your heart first, letting one’s child go/roam free (i.e., allowing them to operate without restraint or discipline) also applies. We cringe when we hear the stories on the news about someone abandoning their child in a dumpster or leaving a child to die, but neglect of parental duties (even when the child is at home) can easily be just as heinous an act.
- The comfort presented in this verse lets us know that WHEN parents fall short, God is there to provide what we didn’t get or what we needed.

Now, all that being said, I challenge each of you (now that you’re older) to take an extremely sincere retrospective look at your past. Knowing what you know now, look at what you missed while growing up — from God’s perspective. The embodiment of Psalm 27:10 is reflected in the fact that God, knowing what we really have need of, provides us with inroads to the knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and discipline that we did not receive as children, adolescents, and teenagers.

Think about it. Were you disciplined properly when you were growing up? Were you raised by people who felt that everything you did was cute? Were you raised by people who made excuses for your lack of excellence? Were you made to feel comfortable during times of failure? Were you one of those kids that was happy just to “play the game”, never really experiencing “the thrill of victory”? Did the adults in your life stress outward “sharpness”, but allowed your heart and mind to be “dull”? Were you one of those kids whose parents didn’t want anyone else to correct you (even though they weren’t doing it)? Did your parent(s) or guardian(s) neglect to expose you to tasks that required responsibility and discipline? Did you get “checked” when you were out of order? Did people fail to teach you, objectively, about life? Did the adults in your life have series of failed and poor relationships (indirectly failing to give you an opportunity to view a good example).

If your answers to ANY of these questions are “Yes!”, you were forsaken. Never fear though!!! God is (and has been) committed to “taking us up” — giving us the guidance and instruction that we never received!! My heart truly blesses Him for “taking us up”!!! God knows we ALL need it!

What's Remembered About You?

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.... (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)

Proverbs 29:26 says, “Many seek the ruler’s favour; but every man’s judgment cometh from the LORD.” Not that someone’s seeking my favour, but the questions presented by this statement are critical.

- Do you desire favor?
- Whose favor are you seeking?
- Do you realize where your judgment is coming from?

Take some time to ponder on these questions. When you’re done, consider the statement Paul made to the Thessalonians. Thanks was given for the Thessalonians and certain things were remembered about them, such as:

- Their work of faith;
- Their labor of love and
- Their patience of hope in the Lord Jesus.

The Thessalonians were doing the right things. That’s excellent. In addition, not only were they doing the right things, but they did them in the sight of God. They did the right things, with the right motives, and with the right “person” in mind.

Our operative question today involves what is remembered . . . ABOUT YOU!!! Whether you realize it or not, you are known! God sees you, but people see you too. Now, don’t lose sight on God’s perspective of you, but what GODLY people remember about you is critical also. It impacts peoples’ thankfulness and it impacts prayer time. When you leave a positive impression, as the Thessalonians did, you will be remembered favorably in the hearts of those that truly matter.

Remember, don’t strive to be remembered. Strive to be excellent in all that you do. The result? Godly behavior results in godly impact (which is only good). Godly behavior inspires (the sheep). Godly behavior also glorifies God. Everybody wins.

What do people remember about you . . . and what are they doing as a result? It’s not that we should strive to know the answer to these questions, but we SHOULD be aware that doing the right things is beneficial on many levels. If you’re faithful to Christ, it’s definitely safe to say that someone’s praying for you.

Caring For The Flock

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed... (1 Peter 5:1)

The flock. When it comes to the work of the ministry and the main focal point of a pastor's position, this is it. God uses this word, likened unto a group of sheep, to refer to His people — especially those under the care of a pastor.

Flocks come in different sizes and travel in different places, but the overall goal and purpose is exactly the same. And, as implied by the use of the word flock, every flock has a shepherd — overseeing the well-being of the flock, tending to their needs (in conjunction to the aforementioned goals and purposes), warding off predators, guiding the sheep away from danger, administering discipline to the wayward, being an example, etc. In short, this can simply be referred to as caring for the flock.

In order to be successful as a shepherd — caring for the flock in a way that thoroughly pleases the Lord — one must give proper attention to purpose, protocol, and detail. In addition to 1 Peter 5:1's exhortation to "feed the flock," here are three models/examples that reflect God's heart concerning caring for the flock:

(Jeremiah 3:14-15) Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

A pastor that's after God's own heart is reflected by the way in which he feeds the people. "God's diet" calls for knowledge and understanding. Considering the fact that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and understanding, it is safe and prudent to conclude that a true pastor's feedings will be driven by and consist of the fear of the Lord — words reflective of hating evil, pride, arrogance, the evil way, and the froward mouth. Now, according to Proverbs 2, the fear of the Lord is not obtained by osmosis, but by passionate pursuit, leading us to the next point.

(Jeremiah 10:21) For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD: therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered.

The word "brutish" refers to "being consuming and destructive" — both of which are reflective of demonic activity. Why are unsubmitted pastors brutish? They're brutish because they fail to seek the Lord. The Lord doesn't have their head or their heart. The result? The people under them suffer (see also Matthew 9:36).

(John 10:11) I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

First John 2:6 says, "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." Following Jesus' example as a shepherd, the true pastor is called to put the needs of the people before his own — living in a sacrificial way to ensure the well-being of the flock. This is why a true pastor (and minister) will/must experience that which really has nothing to do with their own personal development. Selah.

These are just some of the elements and attitudes required in order to care for the flock. I think about them regularly, but it occurred to me that someone else needs to know.

Understanding Gifts

Someone once asked a great question in the RCA Discussion Forums. I thought it would be highly beneficial to share the interaction:

Question: I was reviewing the scriptures from last Sunday's message, 'Knowing That You are Heard.' I was focusing on Luke 11:13: If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? I was thinking about the people that reject the Holy Ghost, saying it is a gift. It almost seems like they are minimizing it or separating it from the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Or they say, if God wants me to have that gift he will give it to me.

Here it says the person has to ask for it. Not just something God drops on unsuspecting Christians that were not even expecting it. With this being said, is this scripture referring to the Holy Ghost literally? Or is something else being communicated (context)? I just want to be clear. Thanks.

Answer: Very well put and you're absolutely right. The Holy Ghost is something that must be desired. And yes, in Luke 11, Jesus is literally referring to the Holy Ghost.

With regards to a "gift", as discussed in a recent Bible Study (and after service), we have to make sure that we understand words and concepts from God's perspective. When God uses the word "gift", he's not referring to something that's a "surprise". He told people about the gifts that He gives. He educates us about gifts (something that's not done with an "earthly" gift). God also requires that we QUALIFY for His gifts.

Consider the following examples of qualifying for "God's gifts":

- 1. Prophesying only serves those that believe; hence, "at-length" preaching and teaching of the truth is only given to those who qualify.*
- 2. A pastor after God's own heart is only given to apostate/backsliding people who turn (i.e., repent and desire truth).*
- 3. Wisdom is only laid up for the righteous.**
- 4. Freedom is only attained by those who keep God's word and receive the truth.*
- 5. An entrance into God's everlasting kingdom is only given to those who give diligence to make their calling and election sure.*
- 6. Grace is only given to the humble.*
- 7. The Holy Ghost is only given to those who: a) believe on Jesus as the scriptures have said; b) obey him; and c) ask for it (i.e., desire it).*

Each of the above is reflective of something that God gives. In each case, the standard (earthly) dynamics associated with gifts do not apply.

* With #3, someone may be thinking about the fact that God gives wisdom to those who ask for it. Don't confuse James' statement with the passage from Proverbs. It's not a contradiction. Receiving a "bit" of wisdom is different than having it "laid up" for you. Selah.

The Blessing & Validation of Vexation

And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)... (2 Peter 2:7-8)

During the recent “Revisiting Sodom” teaching, there was one element from 2 Peter that we did not cover — VEXATION. Do you know what vexation is (i.e., to “be vexed”)? There are two different definitions in 2 Peter 2:7-8. They are as follows:

Definition #1 (used in “vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked”)

To be distressed, with the implication of being worn out by such an experience.

Definition #2 (used in “vexed his righteous soul from day to day”)

To torture (Strong’s). To experience mental torment involving sorrow mixed with anger (Louw-Nida).

Now that we know the definitions, let’s look at 2 Peter 2:7-8. Lot was VEXED. Why? He was VEXED because of the filthy conversation (manner of life) of the wicked people in Sodom and Gomorrah. In other words (considering the definitions we just reviewed), Lot was “worn out internally”, “tormented”, and “upset” as a result of the things he saw and heard each day while going in and out amongst those that lived in Sodom and Gomorrah.

Being VEXED is a reflection of the state of one’s soul. A RIGHTEOUS PERSON, when encountering things that contradict the standards of God, will INDEED BE AFFECTED. A righteous person can and will be worn out (i.e., become tired and drained) by always seeing and hearing wicked behavior. A RIGHTEOUS PERSON, when beholding and listening to that which God considers to be sin, will be tormented in their heart and mind (i.e., suffer frustration and eventually be pricked in their soul). A RIGHTEOUS PERSON, when experiencing things that God considers detestable, will become upset about such things (i.e., become godly indignant — angry in a godly manner).

While these experiences may sound unpleasant and uncomfortable, they actually serve as a form of proof that a person has a righteous soul. Such is God’s testimony of Lot. It was Lot’s soul that was vexed by the things he saw and heard. Likewise, the soul of a righteous person, today, will go through the same turmoil.

Vexation is a form of suffering . . . but the true Christian is actually called to suffer, so this is not a curse. It is, rather, a blessing. Being vexed (of a truth) also helps to keep you from being guilty of what you’re vexed about. GOD HELP THE PERSON WHO CLAIMS TO BE A CHRISTIAN THAT IS NOT VEXED BY SEEING AND HEARING THE DEEDS OF THE UNGODLY. The operative question today concerning such things is . . .

What is **YOUR** testimony?

Controlling or Loving?

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

One of the things I have always found to be shocking and consistent during my days in Christ is the fact that carnally-minded people, especially those who despise dominion, have practically no understanding of love and authority.

Want an example? There was once a woman that found offence in people who were forthright and bold concerning their presentation of Jesus Christ. Now, this same woman had a lot to say, herself, but never spoke authoritatively (something that is REQUIRED by God of those who speak on His behalf). She always spoke about things that had no merit and were based on opinion (i.e., no proof). When she heard others speak in a bold and irrefutable manner, she was offended and (unfortunately) came to the conclusion that such people were controlling and closed-minded.

Here are the problems with such a mindset:

- Consider this quote from 2 Timothy 4 (Wuest's translation): "make a public proclamation of the Word with such formality, gravity, and authority as must be heeded. Hold yourself in readiness for this proclamation when opportunity presents itself and when it does not; reprove so as to bring forth conviction and confession of guilt; rebuke sharply, severely, and with a suggestion of impending penalty." Such a presentation leaves no room for compromise or a sense of option.
- Titus 2:11-15 says, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world...These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee." This discourse ends with a command to present the word of God with the utmost level of authority.

We could go on and on with examples, but the message is already clear. Lastly, however, consider 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. It lets us know that the love of Christ constrains US into a certain mode of belief and conviction. The word "constrain", in Louw-Nida, refers to "exercising continuous control over someone or something." One of the definitions in Strong's is "to arrest". Therefore, the love of God actually "arrests" our thought processes, causing those who submit to God to have the mindset that because Jesus died for all that all should live unto Him — submitted in all things.

You see, the person who is presenting an uncompromising God and His truth ISN'T CONTROLLING. Such a person IS CONTROLLED — by the Holy Ghost — and commanded what to present. Such a "closed-mindedness" is a result of being "under arrest". Such a presentation is the only one that God ordains. Such a presentation . . . IS one of love. One who complains of such a presentation . . . isn't one of "the US" and, therefore, doesn't have the One who is doing the constraining. Compende? :-)

Behold the Fig Tree

And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. (Mark 11:13)

Are you familiar with the scriptural account of Jesus and the fig tree? It's recorded in two places, but we'll focus on Mark's record for today's exhortation. Mark 11:12-14 reads as follows:

And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.

After entering into the temple and dealing with the moneychangers, the same evening, Jesus and the disciples passed by the same tree. Mark records the following (v. 19-21):

And when even was come, he went out of the city. And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.

While some people choose to focus on Jesus following discourse (about faith), in so doing, many fail to get the hidden message about the tree. Please note the following:

- Jesus was hungry (i.e., desired something, was looking for fruit).
- He went to the tree for the express purpose of partaking of what it had to offer.
- From a distance, the tree had the appearance of being blessed (bearing leaves).
- Had the tree not borne leaves, Jesus would not have approached it.
- Finding the tree in a deceitful state, it received that which was due — cursing by the Lord.

What do people miss (in addition to the items listed above)? People miss the fact that people who seek the Lord are likened unto trees. For example, in Psalm 1, the leaves of a blessed tree don't wither. Taking that to mind, the tree that Jesus approached was expected to have fruit available.

What's the message? Beware of LOOKING THE PART! Beware of SEEMING USEFUL!!! Beware of HAVING THE APPEARANCE OF BEING OF GOD!!! God comes to us and expects to find fruit — fruit that He has ordained and empowered us to produce. Yet another passage about fruit and trees, found in Hebrews 6:7-8 says, "For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned." Those who don't bear fruit, but look the part are nigh unto cursing. Behold the fig tree and examine yourself accordingly.

The Kind Warrior

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

One of the things that has always amazed me — both as a minister and a pastor — is the level of understanding (or lack thereof) that people have concerning those in ministry. Over 9 out of 10 people have absolutely no understanding of the mindset that a true minister operates under. Could it be because they're not exposed to real ministers? That's one reason. Could it be because ministers keep themselves at arm's length (i.e., inaccessible) to most people? That's definitely another reason. Could it also be because of a failure of the average Christian to obey the scriptures that are associated with knowing those in ministry? Absolutely! Could it also be because of ignorance about how ministers are commanded to operate and/or the scriptural history of ministerial activity? This is the most common cause.

A conversation I had with some folks after a recent service sent me down memory lane concerning such issues. Before I mention the recollection, please consider the following scriptures regarding insight on the heart and mindset of true ministers:

- Numbers 12:3 — (Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)
- Jeremiah 18:19-20 — Give heed to me, O LORD, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them.
- Jeremiah 17:16 — As for me, I have not hastened from being a pastor to follow thee: neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was right before thee.
- Hebrews 13:7 — Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.
- 2 Timothy 2:3 — Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Meekness — frequently resisting the temptation to retaliate. Dealing with the turmoil of being misunderstood. A passion for excellence and dedication to providing the people with truth. Serving as an example. Maintaining the heart of a good soldier. All of these things (and more) make up what God considers to be a true minister. The most assertive and dominant of these traits, however, is that of a warrior. Without a warrior's mentality, the minister will fail. So many people expect ministers to be “pushovers”, failing to recognize the call to be a warrior. Being that God has called people to understand those in ministry, today's operative question is... HOW WELL DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE KIND WARRIOR?

Failure to know those that labor among you usually results in resistance, devaluing the operation and office, contempt, rebellion/mutiny, blasphemy, confusion (i.e., a life void of peace), and having a life void of true leadership. Make sure that you answer the call to understanding this matter.

Unto His Disciples (Privileged Information)

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believknow the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31-32)

In John 8:31-32, Jesus presents a critical message that gets overlooked by most. Where is the hidden message? It's hidden in the word "disciples". The word "disciple" means "a learner or pupil". Contrast this definition with the hordes of idle, insincere, and lazy church attendees and it's no wonder why the church world is in the shape it's in. The hidden message, however, is in the word "discipline" — an extension of the word disciple. Without discipline, a person's testimony is called into question.

The point I want to address today, however, is not the word "disciple", nor is it about discipline. Jesus said that those who continue in His word (disciples) will know the truth. In other words, those who truly serve the Lord will be privy to exclusive information (compared to the aforementioned "folks in the number").

To clarify this issue, I'd like to present some passages that illustrate Jesus sharing critical information with His disciples.

- (Matthew 9:37-38) Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.
- (Matthew 16:21) From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.
- (Matthew 16:24-28) Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.
- (Luke 20:45-47) Then in the audience of all the people he said unto his disciples, Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; Which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation.

These were just a few statements that Jesus made unto His disciples. What we fail to recognize about these things is that, had they not been included in scripture, others would not have been privy to them. Privileged information is reserved for those who honor and serve God of a truth. If such messages are hid, they are hid unto those who are lost. Selah.

Pastoral Awe

Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah. (Psalm 4:4)

Some people (those without knowledge of ministry and those who have failed to read the scriptures properly) think that being angry, for a pastor/leader, is inappropriate. Such a mindset is erroneous. If you think that the pastor shouldn't get upset, you're one of those people that wants to put leadership in an unrealistic "box" — a "box" that the same person wouldn't dare enter. Such is the act of a Pharisee (to expect something of someone that one would not do themselves). To some, what I'm presenting may sound strange, but to the wise man, you'll realize that (once again) I'm presenting something that will keep you from: 1) having an evil eye; 2) being guilty of evil surmisings and 3) will help you to know the truth so that you can operate in freedom concerning what to expect from ministry. It will save your life.

Please consider the following.

- Moses' Anger (Exodus 32:19) — "And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing; and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount." In this instance, Moses learned that the people had sinned and responded accordingly — with godly indignation (a type of anger that few Christians are aware of). Not only did Moses get angry, but his actions following his discovery were appropriate for any "God-ordained" leader — take steps to counter the sin and make sure that people understand how critical it is/was.
- Jesus' Anger (Mark 3:1-5) — "And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other." Here, we see Jesus (yes, Jesus) in a state of anger. Again, however, it isn't fleshly anger. It's another example of godly indignation. Jesus is angry because of the hardness of heart (Greek: spiritual destitution) of the people.

God has NEVER given leaders the burden of not being angry. What he has done, however, is commanded that we (all of us — non-leaders included) BE YE ANGRY AND SIN NOT (Ephesians 4:26). This passage is a quote from Psalm 4:4. This type of anger is actually a "state of shock" because you can't believe someone did a particular thing. All-in-all, the bottom line is that regardless of what someone does, one must not allow themselves to be provoked to sin.

As a pastor, I stand in awe about such things as people's failure to overcome laziness, spiritual destitution, failure to submit to God or respond to truth, cowardice (afraid to discuss critical matters because of what they know will be said), failure to prioritize correctly, failure to walk in wisdom, inconsistency, failure to understand why these things vex me, etc. In all these things, however, while I may "flip over the tables", God's order remains at the forefront. I understand this. Do you?

The Rejected

Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. (Luke 13:24)

The main job of a disciple of Christ is to bear fruit. Unfortunately, many fail to understand this simple truth. Instead of focusing on bearing fruit, people focus on such things as:

- Going to church;
- Joining the choir;
- Reading so-called religious books;
- Watching so-called Christian TV;
- Going to conferences and seminars;
- Attending church social functions;
- Holding pastor appreciations;
- Attending prayer services;
- Participating in children's programs.

Practically all of the people who participate in the aforementioned events or behaviors will tell you that their hope is to spend eternity with the Lord (i.e., go to Heaven). What they fail to realize is that one cannot spend eternity with God without meeting His requirements.

You see, MANY seek to enter God's kingdom, but entrance is actually only reserved for the few. Luke 13:24 speaks of the fact that MANY seek to enter, but will not be able. Matthew also quotes Jesus' presentation on this matter, stating the following:

(Matthew 7:13-14) Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Entering in at the strait gate is a path that must be found. The path to the strait gate is one of compliance and a fruit-bearing lifestyle. People who focus simply on going to church, singing in choirs, praying (on cue instead of genuinely), etc., are not submitting to the will and call of God. As a result, they will fall into (or stay in) the realm of the rejected. Hebrews 6:7-8 provides insight on this wise, saying "For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs (i.e., fruit) meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned."

Instead of bearing fruit (bringing forth that which results from obedience to God) people who don't submit to Him bring forth briers and thorns — a sign of cursedness. The operative questions are clear. WHY ARE YOU HERE TODAY?!? DO YOU WANT TO SPEND ETERNITY WITH CHRIST??? ARE YOU STRIVING TO LEARN OF HIM SO THAT YOU CAN GIVE HIM THE GLORY DUE UNTO HIM??? OR ARE YOU JUST A RELIGIOUS, EXCUSE-MONGERING, SLOTHFUL, SELF-SEEKING, FREELOADING, PRESUMPTUOUS BUFFOON WHO ONLY DESIRES TO LOOK LIKE YOU BELONG?!?!?!?

Strive to enter into the strait gate. Everyone who does not strive

Overcoming Self-Induced Leanness

And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul. (Psalm 106:15)

This morning, a recent, brief encounter came to mind. I had a conversation with a woman who attends (or attended) a local church that taught her to believe that she could (and did) get anything she wanted from the Lord. She claimed that God NEVER denied any of her requests.

The first thing that came to mind was Psalm 106:15. When someone imposes their will on the Lord (and yes, it has happened before and does happen today), there is a price to pay. The price? Such a person is stricken with leanness in their soul. In other words, people who “get what they want” end up not getting what God wants — a dangerous and inadvisable place to be.

Let’s refer to this “phenomenon” as “self-induced leanness”. You see, God does not desire that a person have a lean soul. His heart is reflected in Isaiah 55:1-2. It says, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”

How does a person incur self-induced leanness? A look at the infractions that led up to the consequences in Psalm 106:15 (in a present tense manner) tell the story.

- Doomsaying — always embracing the worst-case scenario when faced with adversity.
- Being “spiritually moody” — only tending to believe God and praise Him when He moves on your behalf.
- Being forgetful — never developing patience and trustiness in the Lord via tribulation.
- Being heady — moving too quickly and failing to wait on godly counsel before moving.
- Misalignment — failing to have a proper mindset when in the wilderness, lusting after the desires of the heart instead of pressing into Him.
- Given to spiritual extortion — making demands of God and using those demands as a means of proving God’s stance on one’s own behalf.

The main trigger of soul-leanness? God’s responding-in-kind to someone tempting Him. Remember, only a wicked and (spiritually) adulterous generation seek a sign from God, threatening not to believe unless they get it. In order to overcome self-induced leanness, we must remember that the Lord God Almighty is sovereign. Personally, I’m EXTREMELY thankful for this, because the scriptures let us know that He already knows what we need. Therefore, we couldn’t possibly know better than Him. So, in addition to recognizing and submitting to His sovereignty, we must strive to fulfill Isaiah 55:1-2. We must strive to let our soul delight itself in fatness by taking His yoke and learning of Him — as the scriptures have said — and nailing our will to the cross.

Marriage's Indirect Impact

For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? (Matthew 19:5)

Many things happen when a man and woman become united through marriage. For some people, all they see is the pomp and circumstance of the wedding. Others get cases of the “giggles” as they know what happens on wedding night. For those interested in wisdom, God wants us to take other things into consideration and to heart. One of the main by-products of a marriage is its alteration of relationship dynamics. Here are just a few of the items that we should be aware of:

- The most important person in the husband's life is his wife. She is now (and not before) bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.
- The most important person in the wife's life is her husband. She must recognize that she is now part of her husband — as if the “rib from Adam's side” has been grafted back in.
- The wife is to submit to her husband and serve as his crown and his companion. The husband's focus is on his wife — to cherish, nourish, and love her as Christ loved the church.
- The authority levels of the parents now take a back seat. The partners in a marital union are not to respond to and/or look out for their parents more than they respond to and look out for their spouse.
- Any previously-born children who become a part of the marital unit are now under the complete authority of the husband-wife unit.
- Persons who birth a previously-born child still have visitation rights, but the fact that they birth a child DOES NOT give them any authority to dictate how things will operate. We must remember that an act of irresponsibility (birthing a child out of wedlock) does not give a person full parental rights, as they are not a parent. In other words, a “slave to lust” does not receive power as a reward.
- When a man finds a wife, he also finds favor of the Lord (Proverbs 18:22). If a parent or a person who birth a child that becomes part of a marital union attempts to hinder, impact, or influence the union or the jurisdiction of that union [e.g., 1) a mother or father trying to exert “expired” parental authority on the husband or wife (their child), 2) a “birth contributor” making demands about the child that became part of the union, etc.] will be considered by God to be usurping authority, sowing discord, and/or attempting to cause division or confusion. Such acts will result in judgment, as God sees it fit to recompense tribulation to those troubling His children (2 Thessalonians 1:6). Therefore, one should always tread wisely and softly when dealing with married people and all those directly affected by their union.

People who enter marriage have a great deal of responsibility, but the charges don't end there. We are all responsible for how we impact the marriages of others. When you stand before the Lord, let it be said that you were found supporting and respecting others' unions in a proper manner (and not to please yourself).

Overcoming Seduction Sessions

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils... (1 Timothy 4:1)

Have you ever been involved in a “seduction session”? You know what that is, right? A “seduction session” takes place when you’re interacting with someone (that you shouldn’t be fellowshipping with) and a topic comes up (about someone or something) that you have either been taught about fully or that you have a strong foundational knowledge of.

Consider the following passages on seduction:

- (2 Kings 21:9) But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel.
- (Ezekiel 13:10) Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar:
- (Mark 13:22) For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.
- (Revelation 2:19) I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

The seduction begins when the disobedient or carnal-minded person tries to disarm you concerning that which God wants you to be committed to. By the time the session is over, many times, the “informed person” becomes willing to question their previous commitment or stance. At times, I can tell when someone from the ministry has been in a seduction session recently by their response to something that takes place at service. Once I see the response, the Lord lets me know why the person responded in such a manner. Remember, there are times when you don’t say anything with your mouth, but God still blesses me to hear your heart.

Taking part in a “seduction session” is extremely dangerous. Interestingly, many of us are not aware when we’re in one. The first key to overcoming a “seduction session” is knowing that you’re in one — that someone’s trying to seduce you. Next, you need to have a firm hold on what God requires (i.e., you need to be circumspect). Lastly, you need to be committed to the word and way of the Lord. If these things are in place, you needn’t fear “seduction sessions”.

Though there’s no need to fear them, however, we do need to be aware of their existence and their identifying marks so that we’ll respond soberly and vigilantly.

Paths to Healing

Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities. (1 Timothy 5:23)

This past week, I experienced a health-related ordeal. I prayed. I fought. I learned. God moved. I won. Praise be unto the Lord for His care and lovingkindness!

This week's challenges brought several thoughts to mind — several of which I was unctoned to share with the congregation. Before I present some of the general thoughts, however, we need to consider an interesting passage of scripture wherein Paul instructed Timothy on how to deal with some health-related issues in his life.

In 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul mentions the fact that Timothy was sick often. He instructed Timothy to drink wine as a means of managing the problem. This is very interesting — not because Paul mentions wine (which wasn't fermented [i.e., alcoholic], but was actually grape juice) — but it was interesting because Paul said absolutely nothing about prayer, laying on of hands, or the move of God to resolve this matter. Instead, he focused on what Timothy should do. Knowing that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, this passage (and others) dismiss the notion that every sickness is resolved via prayer or gifts of healing. God wants us to know, today, that there are other paths. Interestingly, we must remember these paths because ignorance of such paths, many times, is what contributes to our being sick in the first place. In Timothy's case, based on Paul's discourse, the problem may have been the result of sin (a cause that is rarely considered when people are sick). As a matter of fact, we need to be extremely careful to address possible sin when we're sick (as having been the possible cause). As mentioned in James, forgiveness of sins and prayer for healing should go hand-in-hand. Failure to ask for forgiveness when asking for healing is actually foolish.

As I pondered on these truths and sought the Lord about my own challenges this past week (a possible urinary tract infection or kidney stones), the Lord provided some “Paul-like” info and instructions.

- My habits of falling asleep on the couch and sitting on the edge of chairs put excessive stress on my spine. The Lord told me to sit back and stop sleeping on the couch.
- Too much tea isn't good for us. It can lead to kidney stones. I was led to lay off the tea for a while and to drink more water and cranberry juice.
- Spicy food irritates the kidneys. Interestingly, I hadn't eaten Thai food in over a week and was led to avoid it for a while. I guess that explains why we've been eating Chinese.
- I also learned that citrus fruit and juices could cause a problem, so I made sure to be careful concerning the types of juices I had.

The problem ceased after just one day. No laying on of hands. No pillar of fire. No opening of a path in the Detroit River. My healing came by hearing some basic instructions from the Lord and ordering my conversation accordingly. Interestingly, people will line up to see a preacher for healing, when that may not be the solution God is providing. It doesn't matter if the root of one's sickness is sin, happenstance, or a myriad of contributing factors, the root of an illness (or symptoms) must be addressed in order for healing to take place. If we don't realize what we did to cause the problem, it'll happen again and we'll just need deliverance later.

Therefore, the next time you're sick, make sure that you don't focus solely on getting healed. Remember to ask for forgiveness AND for wisdom concerning the issue. Whether it's laying on of hands by the elders or wisdom concerning our behavior, God is still the source of victory. Just make sure that you're not demanding concerning your path to healing.

Who's Your Decorator?

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:2)

The renewing of the mind. This is a charge given to everyone who is a Christian. Without knowing what “renewing of the mind” is, however, one cannot fulfill the charge.

First, let's consider the charges:

- And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.
- For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.
- But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.
- Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him....
- But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The word “renew” (including renewed, renewing, etc.) means “a renewal, renovation, complete change for the better”. “Renovation” is the word that gives us a better and more precise idea of what God is after. “Renovate” means “to restore to a former better state (as by cleaning, repairing, or rebuilding)”. In renovation, things that don't belong are replaced with fitting and proper things. If a renovator came to your home and did an appraisal, he/she would identify things that needed to be discarded — what needed to be replaced, what did not comply with standards. Because of this, we can think of “renovation” as being done by a decorator. Therefore, the renewing of the mind, though charged to us, is orchestrated and directed by the Chief Decorator. The target of renovation is OUR MINDS. It is the key to our transformation — our becoming what God wants us to be. If God is dictating the needs of YOUR renovation and you comply, you'll be alright.

The operative question? Who's your decorator? Who has input concerning your “renovation”? Selah.

Dealing With "Dathanitis"

And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD? (Numbers 16:3)

I know. Dathanitis isn't a word. After reading the passage from Numbers 16:3, however, you probably see where this is going already. Just in case you don't (and just because this is what's called for today), here's the breakdown. Those whom God sends have always had to deal a Dathan-like attitude in order to fulfill the job that God has commissioned them for. For the purpose of today's communication, we'll refer to this unprofitable and undesirable attitude as DATHANITIS. It's supposed to sound like a disease, because it is. Consider the errors of Korah, Dathan, et. al. as presented in Numbers 16.

- **Insurrection:** Numbers 16:3 tells us that Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On gathered themselves against Moses and Aaron. Based solely on the fact that God ordained the operation and leadership of Moses and Aaron and the forethought involved, this was an act of insurrection.
- **Inaccurate Assessment of Leadership:** They failed to understand Moses and Aaron's call, function, and authorization.
- **Skewed Judgment:** The perpetrators misjudged the state of the people. They thought that the people were "holy". God saw things differently — so differently that He refused to let those people enter Canaan.
- **False Accusation:** They falsely accused Moses and Aaron of lifting themselves up. In so doing, they actually reflected the same spirit that was later manifested by the Pharisees and Sadducees — accusing people of the same things that they were guilty of (see Numbers 16:7).
- **Forgetfulness & Blindness:** Apparently, they forgot how God showed His support to Moses and Aaron's operation, and associated their operation with pride instead of God's sanction. NOTE: Forgetfulness is akin to and leads to blindness. This is why we must give more earnest heed to the things that we have heard. Failure to remember results in failure to comply and behave wisely.
- **Presenting Unjustifiable Challenges:** The uprisers challenged Moses and Aaron in the form of a question. The fault in such a presentation is that there was absolutely no justification for presenting this question (NOTE: In addition to being generally foolish, the challenge was completely void of entreaty).
- **Ambition:** Numbers 16:9 reveals that the company of Korah was dissatisfied with their current level of responsibility and sought more. Interestingly, people with this fault always find fault with people in the position that they want and seek "future supporters" by presenting the fruit of their skewed judgment.
- **Rebellion:** When Moses called for Dathan and Abiram, they refused to comply.
- **Evil Surmisings:** Dathan and Abiram responded to the invitation with a flurry of false accusations in the form of evil surmisings (suspicion and accusation presented without just cause or evidence). This further proved the jaded state of their hearts.

For many, these offences were followed by judgment. Do you have any symptoms of Dathanitis today? For any guilty party(ies), now is the time to overcome. My hands are clean.

The Importance of Going to Church

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

Have you ever read Psalm 42? Most likely, you have. Have you ever noticed all of the elements mentioned in that Psalm? How about verse 4? It reads as follows:

When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, *with a multitude that kept holyday.*

“Going to church”, as we tend to call it, has always been an important and special time in the lives of those who truly seek the Lord. Consider Psalm 122:1:

I was glad when they said unto me, *Let us go into the house of the LORD.*

The expectations associated with “church”, when proper, has always been the same. It’s not just a time of praise and worship, but a time for learning as reflected by Isaiah 2:3:

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and *let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths:* for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Through church (coupled with the proper operation of ministry), healthy consciences are formed and judgment is understood. Asaph understood this, as reflected in Psalm 73:16-17:

...When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; *Until I went into the sanctuary of God;* then understood I their end.

Some people either don’t go to church, go to the wrong church, or don’t embrace information that’s worthy when they do go to church. As a result, they have little to no understanding. You see, the church is not a “hospital”, as foolish teachers preach, but Paul explains it more accurately in 1 Timothy 3:14-15:

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, *the pillar and ground of the truth.*

Knowing the value of “church”, the faithful always looks forward to being there and sets their heart upon it, as reflected by Psalm 27:4:

One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; *that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.*

All these truths being said, with the heart of God concerning “church” being proven, the only reason a person wouldn’t come to church is because they are unsubmitted — avoiding the presence and authority of God just as Adam and Eve did when they heard His voice walking in the garden. If you want the benefits of being saved, you MUST make sure that you have a proper view of church . . . and you must make sure that you don’t forsake the assembling of the saints together. One who forsakes the assembling . . . forfeits the benefits.

Knowing Leadership

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

The scriptures are clear. God has provided, established, and qualified leaders for the stability of operation in the kingdom of God. He has also given commandments concerning how those in the kingdom should relate to those in leadership.

While the commandments are quite clear (e.g., submit, obey, give double honour, esteem highly in love, speak no evil of [i.e., do not misrepresent], receive not accusation from false sources about them, etc.), interestingly, there is one command concerning leadership that actually helps to facilitate the others. First Thessalonians 5:12 commands us to KNOW THEM THAT LABOR AMONG YOU AND ARE OVER YOU IN THE LORD, AND ADMONISH YOU. This principle is not only presented in Thessalonians, but exemplified in 2 Timothy 3:10-11. Timothy fulfilled this principle, according to Paul. It says, “But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured...” Without knowing them that labor among you, submitting, obeying, giving double honour, resisting false witness, etc., can and will be a daunting task. It can also (easily) result in questioning the things presented to you by leadership.

All that being said, of course, this presents some operative questions to Remnant Christian Assembly regulars. In an age where pastors and leaders are “shielded” from people that attend their churches or only experience a political front, those that attend RCA have frequent, at-large access to me. In other words, there are NO EXCUSES for RCA folks. EVERYBODY at RCA should know me — at least to a certain level, enough to facilitate fulfillment of the commandments of the Lord.

OPERATIVE QUESTION: How well do you know the pastor’s . . .

Doctrine?	Manner of Life?	Purpose/Passion?	Faith?
Longsuffering?	Charity?	Patience?	Persecutions?
Afflictions?	Meekness?	Accuracy/Integrity?	Diligence?

NOTE: *While God is in the business of giving leaders the info they need to govern the body, we must be careful to understand that the command to “know” is given to those in the state of submission — not to the pastors and leaders. In other words, those who do not make the effort will have nothing to show for it AND are subject to forfeiting the blessings associated with the obedience.*

Now, does this mean that you need to go to dinner or hang out at the pastor’s house? No. If you feel that you’re falling short or need more wisdom to fulfill the commandment to “know”, ask God for grace and wisdom — so that you don’t sell yourself short. Remember, Jesus’ yoke and burden are easy and light. You’d be surprised how little you need to do. Make sure that you know those that labor among us (accurately) — especially the pastor. It is **YOUR** responsibility.



Pastor Darren W. Hood
Remnant Christian Assembly
Southfield, Michigan

About the Author

Bishop Darren W. Hood is the pastor of Remnant Christian Assembly and the former Director of Scenario Ministries International. He is also the author of the Bible Study Dynamics™ course and Prelude™ Sunday School materials.

Bishop Hood was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ on September 20, 1979 and received the baptism of the Holy Ghost on September 23, 1979. He was called to ministry in 1980, but fled at first. After receiving additional wisdom from the Lord, Bishop Hood came to understand the calling and his responsibility and responded to the call, preaching his trial sermon in 1981. During that sermon—“Born to Make a Change” (from Romans 13:8-14)—Bishop Hood displayed signs to come in his ministry, addressing the congregation about a call to overcome hypocrisy and submit to God’s transformation process. “God called us to take off the works of the flesh and present our bodies a living sacrifice!”, he exhorted. Many were offended at this message and began to separate themselves from Bishop Hood and despise his person.

Shortly after preaching his trial sermon and in response to it, Bishop Hood received some ungodly counsel about how to do ministry. He was advised by his (then) pastor that he “studied too much to be pastoral and needed to be more like an evangelist.” In other words, he was just supposed to focus on encouraging people. This confused Bishop Hood (then, Minister Hood), having been taught by the Lord directly about how ministry is to be performed and how ministers are supposed to seek God about what they should teach.

The ungodly counsel and its impact led to and preceded a period of great perplexity. During this period, Bishop Hood met and married someone whose whole purpose was to destroy him. His wife committed adultery and subjected him to tremendous physical, mental, and emotional abuse. He survived, however, having overcome through the power of the Lord.

Confusion continued, however, with Pastor Hood feeling extremely sorrowful about what he had experienced and having no support. Recognizing his fault, but not really having anyone to minister to him about what had happened, Bishop Hood went into what he refers to as “silent years”. He didn’t minister. He avoided the pulpit completely. He wasn’t very visible. He wasn’t “on fire”, but wouldn’t turn his back on the Lord. He wasn’t bitter with God, but lacked the direction and confidence to arise out of his failures.

After about 6-7 years, deliverance came. As Pastor Hood trudged through life, the Lord began to show his hand, providing wisdom, guidance, and insight. Eventually, following several years of silence, God “resurrected” Pastor Hood’s faith and his ministry, bringing forth what you see and hear today.

From the beginning, Bishop Hood has suffered peril, persecution, disdain, despal, hordes of false witnesses, traitors—all at the hands of false brethren—but having obtained help from God, he continues to press forward preaching and living by the unadulterated word of God and blessing multitudes.



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