

Milk & Honey

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Spiritual Food and Encouragement for Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ

Lessons from Leprosy

Steve Hulshizer

In Scripture leprosy is a clear picture of sin. Let's briefly consider some of the similarities.

Leprosy destroys, as does sin. It has been called "living death," which quickly sends our minds back to the beginning and God's words to Adam, "In eating ye shall die." Brother Young translates this, "Dying, ye shall die." Because of sin we are all in the process of dying.

Leprosy destroys feeling as well. The affected members of the body lose all sense of feeling, even to the point where rats have been known to chew on numb limbs without the stricken individual being aware of it. Sin too destroys feelings as it sears the conscience. What once impacted the conscience is now repeated without any sense of guilt.

Leprosy defiles and divides. It made one unclean, and as such the individual was unfit for God's presence and for fellowship with God's people. Likewise sin makes the sinner unfit to enter the presence of a holy God. It can also cause one to be put out of assembly fellowship and render one unfit for the Lord's service.

Leprosy manifests itself in many forms and various degrees. Leviticus 13:2 notes three forms—"a rising, a scab, or bright spot." The rising, or swelling, pictures pride which is at the heart of sin. (Isa. 14:12-14) Perhaps the scab, the covering of an old wound, speaks of the hidden sins in a man's life. Certainly, in most lives there are more of these than manifest themselves openly. The bright spot may picture the pleasures of this world. It has been said, "The bright spots in this world are often the most sinful!"

Leprosy spreads. It, like sin, starts small and spreads. Scripture also uses leaven to picture this aspect of sin. Many sins are not alarming at first, but what seems so harmless is, in fact, fatal. Many in prison tell us that they arrived there "one step at a time." They started with what appeared to be a minor act and progressed in crime until it led to their being put out of society. David experienced this path until it led to murder. He looked, lusted, and then committed adultery, followed by murder. It is for this reason that we might find it helpful to pray as one saint expressed, "Lord, keep me from sins that seem innocent."

Leprosy is diagnosed objectively. What the individual thought of his symptoms did not matter. It was what the priest determined that was important. (Lev. 13:3) What God says is sin, is sin. Man may call sin by another name, or diminish it in some other way, but what God determines to be sin will come under His judgment.

Leprosy required examination. It was obvious at times, but in other cases it took time to fully develop. Man may quickly observe and ignore the true nature of sin, but God has examined mankind for thousands of years and His conclusions are recorded for us in Scripture. (Rom. 3:10-18) Man looks only on the surface, but God looks upon the heart. He sees the true depth of sin to which man has gone.

Thus far all we have considered leaves little hope; however, lepers, like sinners, can be cleansed. Much like the serpent on the pole, the cleansing for leprosy was also objective.

The individual was brought to the priest and if he was declared to be healed the priest was to take two birds and kill one of them. He dipped both of them in the blood and sprinkled it seven times upon the one needing to be cleansed. (Lev. 14:6-7) He then pronounced him clean and released the second bird into the open field. (See Leviticus 14 for more details.)

What a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus who died and shed His blood that we might be cleansed from all the defilement of our sin. (1 John 1:7-9) The released bird picturing His resurrection which assures us of the completeness of His work and our acceptance before a holy God.

With such a clear picture of the awfulness of sin and the wonderful work of Christ, it should cause us to "walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." (1 Thess. 2:12) *

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For men of all ages

Continued from page 4 — *The Gift of Helps*

This is not scriptural, for, while we need those who can give spiritual help and encouragement, we also need those who can provide aid in a physical manner. (Examples: hall maintenance, cutting the grass and shoveling snow, hospitality, aiding elderly believers in a physical way, etc.). There is much that can be done if one is only willing and able to lift his or her hand to the task at hand. In God's eyes both forms of service are vital to a functioning assembly (See Acts 6; 1Tim 3 for a spiritual brother being involved in the physical work of the assembly.)

In dealing with these problems Paul emphasizes the objective of unity in the assembly. The result of it will be that all members care for each other equally.

A most vital gift, often spoken of in a somewhat condescending manner, is "a help." You will hear believers say, "Well, if I can't do anything else at least I can be a help." This isn't what Paul meant when he mentioned this gift. It is not a catchall for everyone who can't do anything else. Let us see what it means.

The word "helps" is a nautical term. In Paul's time, all sailing ships were made of wooden planks. The constant pressure of rough seas and storms would cause planks to come loose, and ships would take on water and sink. To minimize this problem, ships were put into dry dock, and straps were run under the hull and attached to the two sides. These straps were then tightened, and held the ship together when it was out at sea. Passengers, however, knew nothing of the existence of these straps, nor of the vital role they played in their personal safety. These straps were known as "helps."

This describes the gift that is given to some believers. They are in the assembly to hold the ship together when everything seems to be flying apart. This is a person that God highly prizes; unity among His people is His chief aim. He said "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is that brethren dwell together in unity" (Psa 133:1). He goes on in the rest of the Psalm to describe what that unity means to Him.

The gift of helps is one that we should all desire. Paul said, "Covet earnestly the best gifts" (1Cor 12:31). Covet to be a help, and God will bless you for it. *

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The great god 'Entertainment'

A.W. Tozer

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth, and turn aside to myths! 2 Tim. 4:3-4

The great god 'Entertainment' amuses his devotees mainly by telling them stories. The love of stories, which is characteristic of childhood, has taken fast hold of the minds of the retarded saints of our day, so much so that many manage to make a comfortable living by spinning yarns and serving them up in various disguises to church people. What is natural and beautiful in a child, may be shocking when it persists into adulthood, and more so when it appears in the sanctuary and seeks to pass for true religion!

So today we have the astonishing spectacle of millions of dollars being poured into the unholy job of providing earthly entertainment for the so-called people of God. Religious entertainment is in many places rapidly crowding out the serious things of God. Many churches these days have become little more than poor theaters, where fifth-rate "producers" peddle their shoddy wares with the approval of evangelical leaders who can even quote a holy text in defense of their delinquency. And hardly a man dares raise his voice against it! *

His Flock

Wayne Schlichter

This whole chapter (Ezek. 34) is full of information. The Sovereign God has an issue with those who are to Shepherd His flock. In this chapter, He is speaking of His people, Israel. The shepherds of Israel feed themselves, but not those they are responsible to watch over. God's flock is hungry, scattered, and not cared for.

There is coming a Day (The Millennium), when the True Shepherd, Jesus Christ, will be the Shepherd King over His sheep. He will find the wayward, scattered, and neglected sheep. He will bring them to clean pastures, bind up the wounded, feed them good feed, and heal the sick. The neglectful shepherds He will judge.

This is speaking of God's Old Testament people, but there is a counterpart to this in the Christian Church. New Testament Shepherds have the charge of feeding and flocking the sheep. The LORD is watching over the Shepherds. May all who have this responsibility be careful to fulfill the call. (1 Pet. 5:3-5) *

Headship And Lordship

C. H. Mackintosh

It is deeply interesting and most profitable to mark the varied lines of truth laid down in the Word of God and to note how all these lines stand inseparably linked with the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the divine Center of all truth. It is as we keep the eye of faith steadily fixed on Him that each truth will find its right place in our souls and exert its due influence and formative power over our course and character.

There is in all of us a tendency to be one-sided, to take up some one particular truth and press it to such a degree as to interfere with the healthy action of some other truth and hinder the growth of our souls. It is by the truth, not some truth, we grow; by the truth we are sanctified. But if we only take a part of the truth; if our character is molded and our way shaped by some particular truth, there can be no real growth, no true sanctification. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). It is by the whole truth of God as contained in the Scriptures, that the Holy Spirit forms and fashions and leads in the Church collectively and in each individual believer. And we may rest assured that where some special truth is unduly pressed or some other truth practically ignored, there must be as a result a defective character and an inadequate testimony.

Take for example the two great subjects named at the head of this article — "Headship and Lordship." Is it not important to give each of these truths its due place? Is not Christ Head of His body the Church as well as Lord of the individual members? And, if so, should not our conduct be ruled and our character formed by the spiritual application of the former as well as the latter? Unquestionably. Well then, if we think of Christ as Head, it leads us into a very distinct and a very practical range of truth. It will not interfere with the truth of His Lordship, but will tend to keep the soul well balanced, which is so needful in days like the present. If we think only of Christ as Lord of His servants individually, we shall entirely lose the sense of our relationship one to another as members of that one body of which He is the Head. Then we shall be drawn away into mere independency, acting without the slightest reference to our fellow members. Each will stand out in his own intense individuality, practically disowning all vital connection with his brethren.

On the other hand when the truth of Christ's Headship gets its proper place in our souls—when we know and believe that "there is one body" and we are members one of another—then we will most fully own that each one of us, in our individual path and service, is responsible to the "one Lord." It

will follow as a grand practical result that our walk and ways are affecting every member of the body of Christ on earth. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." We can no longer view ourselves as independent, isolated atoms, seeing we are incorporated as members of "one body" by "one Spirit" and thus linked with the "one Head" in heaven.

This great doctrine is clearly and fully unfolded in Romans 12:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 12, to which we beg the reader's serious attention. Be it remembered that this truth of Christ's Headship and our membership is not a thing of the past merely; it is a present reality, a grand formative truth to be tenaciously held and practically carried out from day to day. "There is one body." This holds good today, just as thoroughly as when the inspired apostle penned the epistle to the Ephesians. Hence it follows that each individual believer is exerting a good or a bad influence upon other believers.

Does this seem incredible? If so, it is only to carnal reason and blind unbelief. Surely we cannot reduce the Church of God, the body of Christ, to a matter of geographical position. That Church, that body, is united by what? Life? No. Faith? No. By what, then? By God the Holy Spirit! Old Testament saints had life and faith, but what could they have known about a Head in heaven or a body on earth? Nothing whatever. If anyone had spoken to Abraham about being a member of a body, he would not have understood it. How could he? There was nothing of the kind existing. There was no Head in heaven and hence there could be no body on earth. True, the eternal Son was in heaven as a divine Person in the eternal Trinity, but He was not there as a glorified Man or as Head of a body.

Even in the days of His flesh, we hear Him saying, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." No union, no Headship, no membership, no vital connection until after His death upon the cross. It was not until redemption became an accomplished fact that heaven beheld that wonder of wonders — glorified humanity on the throne of God. The counterpart of that was God the Holy Spirit dwelling in men upon earth. Old Testament saints would have understood Lordship, but not Headship. This latter had no existence except in the eternal purpose of God. It did not exist in fact until Christ took His seat on high, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hence this truth of Headship is most glorious and precious. It claims the earnest attention of the Christian reader. We would solemnly and earnestly entreat him not to regard it as a mere speculation, as a matter of no importance. Let him be assured it is a great fundamental truth, having its source in a risen Christ in glory; its foundation in accomplished redemption; its present sphere of display, this earth; its power of development, the Holy Spirit; its authority, in the New Testament. *

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“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is that brethren dwell together in unity” Psa 133:1

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The Gift of Helps

Joseph John Bowman

Precious Seed Magazine

Before focusing on the gift of helps, notice the background for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In my opinion, there are 20 gifts listed in our New Testament. Ten have ceased and 10 are currently with us. Of the 10 presently with us, the public gifts are teaching, ministry, and evangelism. The pastor/teacher can be either public or private, and links with the gift of governments which can also be either the one or the other. The other gifts, although the results will be seen in the public activities of the assembly, are seen in the private function of the believers who possess them.

While emphasis is placed upon those who take public part, there is more weight given to those who operate in private in the teachings of the New Testament.

These gifts in 1 Corinthians are seen to be:

- Distributed in the power of the Holy Spirit – ch 12
- Ministered in the love of Christ – ch 13
- Exercised in the will of God – ch 14.

Because of the importance of what he was telling them, Paul did not want the believers to be: ignorant of Old Testament truth (1Cor 10); ignorant of New Testament truth (ch 12); or purposefully ignorant (14:38).

Every believer has a gift, and it was Paul’s desire that every believer know his gift and practice it. However, there is a danger in using gifts in the public sphere. Sometimes undue encouragement is given to a brother who is seeking to put into practice a gift that he thinks he has, when in fact no such gift is evident. Nothing is to be gained by encouraging such an individual. A far better way of seeking to

edify such a brother is to try to point out to him where his gifts lie, and then to try to help him to develop them.

There are four dangers listed in 1 Corinthians 12:15, 16, 21. These are very real dangers in every assembly. Paul said, “If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head unto the feet, I have no need of you.”

In light of the misapplication Paul outlines 4 dangers on various levels:

v15 – The foot to the hand – Jealousy of someone higher up. This is someone who takes a public part in teaching, ministry, or perhaps as an elder. The Bible says that “Jealousy is cruel as the grave” (Song 8:6).

v16 – The ear to the eye – Jealousy of someone on the same level. This is dealing with competition between two brethren or sisters. The world says that competition is healthy; however, in the assembly it is always deadly.

v21 – The eye to the hand – A superiority of function. One believer might be of the opinion that his gift is of more value or superior in function to that of another believer. This causes a breakdown in the unity between believers and inhibits the exercise of gifts.

v21 – The head to the feet – A superiority of the intellect over the physical, or of the spiritual over the physical. One of the greatest dangers is for one believer to have a feeling of superiority over another, belittling the area of service of the other believer.

This aspect of spiritual service is one that has been most often maligned. There are those who teach that unless you can give spiritual help you are of no value to the assembly.

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