

Milk & Honey

Vol. XXVIII July, 2014 No. 7

Spiritual Food and Encouragement for Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ

Beware: We Live In A Self-centered Age

Keith R. Keyser

“Who, when he (Barnabas) came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.” (Acts 11:23)

We live in a self-centered age. The nineteen-nineties seem to be marked by self-indulgence, tolerance, and wanton pleasure-seeking. People strive to avoid going out of their way for others. Moreover, they selfishly assert that they have “rights,” upon which no one may trample. Paul the apostle noted this perverse attitude when he set down the inspired revelation of the characteristics of the last days. “....Men shall be lovers of their own selves...” stands first on the list of the description of Man’s downward spiral to the spirit of antichrist. (2 Tim. 3:1-2)

One can easily understand this sort of conduct in a world that totally rejects God and His Word. Could it be, however, that this insidious thinking is infiltrating the Church like a silent, creeping cancer? As we survey trends within evangelicalism during the latter half of the twentieth century, it is apparent that many believers are indeed being pressed into this world’s mold (Rom. 12:2). We hear on all sides the cry of the individual, rather than a call for unity within the Body of Christ. The determining criterion for fellowship with a local gathering of Christians is set forth in the question, “Does this assembly meet my needs?” Many believers today cite lack of social activities or programs that meet individual needs as reasons for leaving their local assembly. “What can this church give to me?” supplants “What can I give to Christ?” as the major question in the minds of many believers. This type of thinking is far more prevalent than we might expect. Therefore, having defined the problem, we will proceed to a scriptural alternative.

The saints in Jerusalem were receiving interesting reports concerning various groups of believers that were carrying on the Lord’s service in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Acts 11:19 tells us that these believers were dispersed throughout these regions in the aftermath of the persecution that was initiated by the martyrdom of Stephen. The word in this verse that is translated as “scattered” means “to scatter like seed.” As a result of physical opposition to the Gospel

these believers were scattered by “the Lord of the Harvest” that they might spring up into vibrant testimonies for the Lord Jesus throughout the Middle East. When the assembly at Jerusalem wanted to ascertain the status of these young gatherings they sent Barnabas, one of the great men of the New Testament.

Barnabas, whose name means “Son of Consolation,” is remembered in Holy Writ as being “a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” (Acts 11:24) His real name was Joses, but due to the unique ministry that he exercised among the Christians, the apostles gave him this distinctive surname of Barnabas (Acts 4:36). Barnabas was not a member of the school of thought that puts yourself first. Rather than consider his personal comfort and safety, he traveled vast distances for the purpose of building and encouraging exiled believers. When he observed God’s gracious dealing with these new Christians, “he was glad...” (Acts 11:23) Furthermore, he set about pointing them to the Lord Jesus. It was no social gatherings or programs meeting individual needs that these persecuted believers required. Barnabas recognized that these suffering sheep needed to be pointed to the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11-17; 25-30).

Many believers today are content to let others spoon feed them assorted truths from the Word of God. Nevertheless, this satisfaction with milk falls far short of what God has in store for His children. He wants us to feed on the meat of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is described as the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). If we put away childish things, such as pleasure-seeking in this world, we will be able to taste the preciousness of the Lord Jesus. Having tasted of His pure, unchangeable love, like Barnabas we will seek to comfort and encourage the hurting believers within the Body of Christ. The Lord Jesus laid down His life for the sake of the flock; likewise, we are exhorted “to lay our lives down for the brethren” (1 Jn. 3:16). In this age of selfishness and greed, will we live as Barnabas or as Diotrefes, who loved to have the preeminence (3 Jn. 9)? Will we humble ourselves and take the form of a servant, like our blessed Lord (Phil. 2:7,8)? Or will we squander our lives in pursuit of fleeting pleasures in a world that is destined for destruction? Truly, this age calls for a new generation of sons and daughters of consolation to go forth as bondslaves, rather than as weekend warriors. *

Reprinted from May, 1995

Big Things in the Last Days

Bob Gessner

Reprinted from April, 1994

One of the characteristics of the last days that Paul lists in 2 Timothy 3 is perhaps often overlooked because it is one simple word. He states that men will be *boasters* (verse two). We live in days of big things. Whatever is done has to be done in the biggest way possible. In fact, we sometimes seem to indicate that if it is not big, it's not of God. Let's pause and be reminded of the small ways in which God works in the following verses.

1. When the mighty Pharaoh of the great nation of Egypt needed to have a dream interpreted, God did not grant the ability to any of the wise men in Pharaoh's kingdom. Instead he gave the ability to a prisoner in one of Pharaoh's dungeons. "Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh." (Gen. 41:14)

2. When God needed a powerful speaker to stand in Pharaoh's court and ask for the release of His people, He chose a man who by his own acknowledgement was slow of speech. "Then Moses said to the LORD, 'O My Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue (cannot speak very well)'" (Ex. 4:10)

3. When God needed a king to replace the people's choice, who was head and shoulders above them all, he chose a young shepherd boy. "And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are all the young men here?' Then he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, and there he is keeping the sheep.' ... And the LORD said, 'Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!'" (1 Sam. 16:11,12)

4. When the Lord needed a prophet to admonish Israel, he did not go to the priests or to the trained religious leaders. Then Amos answered, "I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'" (Amos 7: 14,15)

5. When the Lord chose a forerunner to announce the arrival of the long awaited King, He did not dress Him in robes of splendor. "And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey." (Matt. 3:4)

6. When God chose a woman to bring His Son into the world, He did not choose an elegant queen of high society. "And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,...for He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant...He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly.'" (Lk. 1:46,48,52)

7. When God chose the head of the household in which to place His Son, He did not choose a rich nobleman, but a carpenter. "Is this not the carpenter's son?" (Matt. 13: 55)

8. When Christ chose His first disciples, He did not choose from the Pharisees or wealthy merchants. "And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen." (Mark 1:16)

9. When God chose those who would be made members of His church, He did not choose the mighty. "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." (1 Cor. 1:26)

10. And who will God choose in these last days to complete His work, whatever it may be? "...be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." (1 Pet. 5:5,6) *

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to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. Our thinking is not to be "conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Rom. 12:2).

Going back to the story of Eutychus we can see that living on the edge is very dangerous. One need not slip very far to suffer great harm. Scripture over and over again exhorts the saints to be awake and alert. Those who are often "sleepy" live on the edge. Those who are alert and aware of the danger "approve things that are better."

How close are you to the edge? *

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Living on the Edge

Steve Hulshizer

Reprinted from first issue - May-June 1986

Eutychus is certainly not a name that is often thought of when names are being considered for a new son. Neither is he an individual that is often discussed at the mid-week Bible study. There are no books written of his life, and seldom do we hear a sermon concerning him.

We only read of this young man in one verse of Scripture. In Act 20:9 we read, "And there sat in a window a certain young man, named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep; and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead." In the following verse we are told that Paul embraced him and he was revived.

While this brief incident is the only mention of Eutychus in Scripture, there is a very important and practical truth that is illustrated by this story.

In order to learn this truth we might begin by asking ourselves the question, "Why did Eutychus fall from the window?" Our immediate answer would be, "Because he fell asleep." More often than not, when this story is considered the blame is placed on the preacher. He was sleepy and Paul's "long preaching" caused him to sink into deep sleep and he fell.

It is not uncommon today among the saints to hear comments such as; the message was too long, the message was boring, the message was irrelevant, etc. Unfortunately in some cases that may be a problem. However, I doubt whether the Apostle Paul was boring, or that the message was irrelevant. The blame for Eutychus' fall could not be placed on the preacher.

In reality the reason he fell from the window was not because he fell asleep, nor because of Paul's preaching. He fell from the window because he was sitting on the edge! If he had not been sitting on the window edge he would not have fallen from it. It was his position that led to his "downfall." If he had been seated among the saints his sleep would not have caused the fall.

From this simple story we can see why saints "fall" back into the world. Many times it is because they are living on the edge! Too often believers will attempt to live as close as possible to the world without being a part of it. They attempt to walk a fine line between Christianity and the world. In this position, it only takes a little sleep and one finds himself falling right back into the world.

How close are you walking to the world? Is it your practice as a Christian to get as close to the world as possible without being spotted (James 1:27)? Is your music like the world's, but with different labels? Do you attend the same

movie theaters as they would, but only go to the movies that "aren't bad"? Do you dress like the world, but just a little less revealing or suggestive? Are your priorities similar to those of the world? Does your career take priority over Biblical principles? Are your friends also those who live near the edge of the world (Prov. 13:20)? Is your attendance at the assembly similar to the world's attendance at "church"? Do you read worldly magazines? Is your language "close" to the world's? Do you laugh at the world's off-colored jokes? Is your "thinking" like that of the unsaved world? Are the world's standards your standards (James 4:4)?

One of the easiest ways of determining if you are living on the edge of the world is to consider this question. "On what basis do you determine if you should go to a certain place, do a certain activity, or listen to certain music, etc.?" If you find yourself saying, "There is nothing wrong with this," then you are most likely walking very close to, if not in the world.

In Philippians 1:9-10 we read Paul's prayer for the saints. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgement; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ."

Paul prayed that the saints' love would grow in knowledge and discernment. Love that overflows these two boundaries can be as harmful as a river that overflows its banks. His desire is that they "approve," test and go in for, those things that are excellent, or "better." (1 Thess. 5:21) All of this is in view of the Judgment Seat of Christ (Day of Christ), at which each saint will need to give an account for the deeds done in the body. (2 Cor. 5:10)

As believers we should be "testing" things in light of the Judgment Seat of Christ, and going in for those things which are "better." Our test is not, "Is there anything wrong with this?" Our test should be, "Is this the best?" Is this the best book I can read? Is this movie the best thing I can watch? Is this the best place to go? Is this better for me than being at the assembly? Is this the best friend with respect to my spiritual growth? Is this the best bathing suit to wear? Is this the best language I can use? It is not only a question of whether the Lord will be "displeased," but whether He will be "pleased." (1 Thess 4:1b) If we evaluate our activities from this perspective we will find ourselves moving further away from the edge.

It may be helpful to distinguish between "worldliness" and "sin." A sin, as we know, is an act that is contrary to the will of God. On the other hand, worldliness could be defined as an attitude toward the things of the world (Phil. 3:19; 1 John 2:15). The Lord not only wants the believer to be righteous, but also to be "holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16). We are

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...know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? James 4:4

July, 2014

Bailing Out

by J.B. Nicholson, Jr.
Reprinted from January 1990

Gatherings of God's people in many areas across North America are passing through difficult times. Many saints are disheartened by the hardness of the way. If the pattern for the New Testament Assembly is right, why are things seemingly so wrong? What is really happening? I would like to make a few personal observations:

1) It is sometimes assumed that, if you carefully follow the New Testament teaching regarding the Church, you will have no problems. However, where there are people, there are problems. The difference should be — if you follow the biblical instruction on the assembly, you will have biblical answers to your problems (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

2) You cannot have a New Testament assembly without New Testament living. The form is good, but it is not enough. By doing what New Testament Christians did, we will not be what they were. God does not call us to do in order to be. If we are what we should be, the fruit will follow naturally. This conformity to, and abiding in Christ is the key to all effectiveness in the believer's life.

3) There is no benefit to pretending that conditions are better than they are, but we should be careful in not assuming that if our area is bleak, such conditions prevail everywhere. If a man or a ministry is looking to men for financial support, they will tend to promote their work through self-advertising. If, however, they look to the Lord alone for His aid, they will carry on, unknown perhaps, in their labors for Him. Because you know of nothing happening does not mean nothing is happening. The day will declare it.

4) Almost our entire generation has been lost to assembly fellowship (forty to fifty-five years old). Placing blame would be of little value, but the condition does exist. A new crop of exercised young men and women is appearing, but it is a painful time of rebuilding, Patience, encouragement, and opportunities for service are needed.

5) The New Testament Assembly was designed for its environment. The environment was assumed to be tribulation (John 16:33). Where there is tribulation, many assemblies are thriving. Affluence and ease are the most adverse conditions for healthy church growth. We want, in our society, church life as a hobby — something to do for an hour or two on weekends. The New Testament assembly, however, is a full-time job. The assembly will work if the assembly will work.

When times are hard, what can we do? We can bail out, or bail out! The phrase invites quite different responses if you are speaking about a crippled aircraft or a sinking boat. When the plane is going down, bailing out is intended to save only the one who jumps. But bailing out when it pertains to a boat, is intended to save the entire craft.

A boat, as has often been noted, is intended to function in the water, as the Church is designed to be in the world (John 17:15). The problem comes when the water gets into the boat. The solution then, is not to remove ourselves from the vessel, but to remove from ourselves those influences that are taking us down. Worldly pursuits, amusements, attitudes and entanglements should be "bailed out" of our lives by the daily enjoyment of the Son of God. When the ship is "full" (Mark 4:37), we need the Master to change our "great storm" (v. 37) into a "great calm" (v. 39). We must ask our hearts His question: "Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?" (v. 40). Let us hear His word in our souls: "Shalom!" *