



Volume 27

November 1987

Number 11

What Are We Doing For Our Young People?

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Let's build within them a deep respect for the pure word of God which will produce faith which is the foundation of the hope they so badly need. This is the only way to *really* hold our young people." (*The Reflector*, Vol. 27, No. 8 [August 1987]).

Amen! Every word of this quotation from brother Bragwell's article "What Are We Doing To Our Young People?" is true. Let us now consider *how* the young among us must be helped.

ENCOURAGE US! Give us hope! Did Paul say to Timothy, "My brother, it is good to see you so zealous in desiring to teach the gospel to the people in this town, ... but you're wasting your time. We've tried for twenty years and they haven't listened yet and they won't listen to you either. They're interested in going to the amphitheater to see the chariot races, not in coming to worship God." Can you picture Paul saying that? No! But many times I, who am only twenty-one years old, have been discouraged by deterring words uttered by my older and "wiser" brethren. Why? Paul wrote two long letters to Timothy, encouraging him to "fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:12), letting "no man despise thy youth; but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity"

(1 Timothy 4:12). *Those* are encouraging words *that* is the advice, my older beloved brothers in Christ, which I and your other young brethren need to hear. Please, brethren, be followers of Paul as he was a follower of Christ.

LEAD US. My older brethren, how can we be expected to be faithful when you speak of being "retired" and shove us forward into the spiritual fight without leadership or aid? Our five or ten years' service to Christ is as nothing when compared with your thirty to fifty years of battle in our Lord's service. My brethren, did Paul say, "God teach young man! I'll stay at home since I'm retired. I have fought a good fight. Now it is *your* turn to fight Satan." No! God forbid that you tell us such either. Brethren, you who are older, wiser, and more battle-scarred than we, you must lead us till you die. God has no retirement plan for his children. We must "hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end". (Hebrews 3:14). So, my beloved brethren, lead us in the good fight of faith!

LET US SEE YOU IN ACTION! So often we are frightened by the forces of Satan. Yet, when we look around for guidance, we do not see you older saints standing up and being counted. You leave the teaching and preaching for us to do. Or you teach us, relying only upon the studying and growth of your past. You are no longer excited about Christ. You

do not push us or pull us into the work of spreading the gospel. Rather than turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6), you shake your heads when we express our hopes of teaching that devout Catholic or Baptist the Truth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Haven't you read Ephesians 3:19-20? Don't you believe the promise made in those verses? Brethren, lead us in the fight for the souls of men!

My brethren, we younger men and women love you all. Many of you are striving to lead and encourage us to "fight the good fight of faith." But each of you must ask yourself, "Is there anything more I can do for my Lord and Savior?" I am afraid too many brethren erroneously conclude they cannot do more when indeed they can. Brother or sister, are you leading us in the fight for men's souls? T R

(EDITOR'S NOTE: I do not recall having met this young brother. I appreciate this article from him and the personal letter he enclosed with it. It might be good for some of us "older" fellows to sit at his feet for a while. With his zeal and attitude, I predict that he is going to amount to something in the Lord's Cause. Thanks, Michael, for reminding and prodding us in these things that we should already know and be doing.)

'Do Not Be Overly Righteous'

by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Do not be overly righteous, Nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself?-- Eccl. 7:16 (NKJV).

This verse has puzzled Bible students for a long time. It has been subject to various interpretations by Bible commentators. Is the writer warning against too much righteousness? Is he saying that one should take care not to be too holy? Or too wise?

Some think he is simply condemning excessive zeal and strictness in religion? I have good friends who think that this is the case. There are reputable commentators that lend support to this interpretation.

I have problems with the view that this verse is warning against being overly righteous, overly wise or even overly zealous in righteousness and wisdom. It

seems to me, that there must be some other interpretation that better harmonizes with both logic and Scripture.

Can one really be too righteous? Or too wise in the right kind of wisdom? Or too zealous and/or strict in obeying God? If an action or attitude is wrong, then it is not being overly *righteous* -- it is not righteousness at all. If one's wisdom is wrong, then it is not really wisdom but foolishness (Cf. Rom. 1:22). If one's zeal for a cause is wrong then it is not excessive righteousness, but unrighteousness.

The Scriptures teach that we are to love the Lord "with ALL your heart, with ALL your soul, with ALL your mind, and with ALL your strength." (Mark 12:30). "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in ONE point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10). "But it is good to be zealous in a good thing ALWAYS ..." (Gal. 4:18). "But as you ABOUND IN EVERYTHING -- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in ALL diligence, and in your love for us -- see that you abound in this grace also." (2 Cor. 8:7). "But also for this very reason, giving ALL DILIGENCE, add to your faithFor if these things are yours and ABOUND, you *will* be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. 1:5-8). (All Caps mine - EOB).

Now back to our text. The writer of Ecclesiastes often describes things as they APPEAR to be "under the sun" -- viewed from a purely earthly perspective. He sometimes contrasts this with the REALITY of things as viewed from God's perspective. I believe this is the case in the verse we are considering.

In verse 15 he tells what he had seen "in my days of vanity": "*There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, And there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness*". Having seen this he concludes (in his days of vanity): "*Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself?*" If what he had observed in the days of his vanity was the true picture of things, then why not the conclusion, "be not overly righteous"? After all, having seen just men perish in their righteousness, then it must, from that perspective, be good to avoid being overly righteous lest we hasten the destruction. Remember

this is a man observing and reasoning from what he had observed in the "days of his vanity". This is not the reality of things from God's perspective. Verse 17 seems to answer such reasoning from God's perspective: "Do not be overly wicked, Nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time?"

Adam Clarke makes some good observations (of course, I think them good, because I agree with them) on these verses:

"Verse 15. *There is a just man that perisheth*] This is another objection; as if he had said, 'I also have had considerable experience; and I have not discovered any marked approbation of the conduct of the righteous, or disapprobation of that of the wicked. On the contrary, I have seen righteous men perish, while employed in the work of righteousness; and a wicked man prosperous, and even exalted, while living wickedly. The former is indeed a victim of his righteousness, while the life and prosperity of the latter were preserved: hence I conclude, it is not prudent, whatever good there may be in religion, and whatever excellence in wisdom, that men should be over-much righteous, or over-wise: for why should they by austerity and hard study destroy themselves?' So far the objector.

"Verse 16. *Why shouldst thou destroy thyself?*] ... Why shouldst thou be so singular? In other words, and in modern language, 'There is no need of all this watching, fasting, praying, self-denial, &c., you carry things to extremes. Why should you wish to be reputed singular and precise?' To this the man of God answers:

"Verse 17: *Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before thy time?*] Do not multiply wickedness; do not add direct opposition to godliness to the rest of your crimes. Why should you provoke God to destroy you before your time? ...

"It cannot be supposed, except by those who are totally unacquainted with the nature of true religion, that a man may have too much of

the life of God in his soul! And yet a learned doctor, in three sermons on this text, has endeavored to show, out-doing Solomon's Infidel, 'the sin, folly, and danger of being righteous overmuch.' O rare darkness!"

(Clarke's Commentary, Vol. III, pp. 823, 824).

If one's zeal or whatever is sowing discord among brethren, he needs to be rebuked and dealt with appropriately--but as a *factious* or perhaps overly wicked man and not for being overly righteous. It seems to me, to do otherwise would discourage conscientious brethren from giving "ALL diligence" to be as righteous and as spiritually wise as they possibly can be -- lest they over-do it and fall into condemnation.

Anyway, brethren, take these thoughts for what they are worth. T
R

LAURA EHL

Since our last bulletin our sister Laura Ehl has passed away. We again extend our sympathy to her family.

'And They Reported His Good Deeds Before Me'

by Edward O. Bragwell, Jr.

As Nehemiah went about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, he faced many problems. One of his biggest problems was the opposition of outside forces. Three men in particular, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, did all that they could to try to hinder the work that he was doing. The sixth chapter of Nehemiah pays particular attention to the efforts that these men made in trying to stop Nehemiah's work. They tried to distract him (v. 2-4). They tried to discredit him (v. 5-9). They even tried to lead him into sin (v. 10-13). But none of these things kept Nehemiah from completing the task that his God had put into his heart. The wall was finished and his enemies sadly watched all their efforts to prevent it go for naught. (v. 15,16).

Although these men were unable to accomplish what they had hoped, something interesting is recorded concerning

one of them toward the end of this sixth chapter. Tobiah had special connections with some of the Israelites. He had married one of their daughters. As a result, some of the Israelites tried to convince Nehemiah that Tobiah was not really a bad fellow. It says that "they reported his good deeds" before Nehemiah. Of course, Nehemiah knew better. He had first hand experience of Tobiah's deeds. He was able to see this man's fruits and knew exactly what kind of man he was. Tobiah may have had some good points to be sure, but that didn't change the fact that he had done much harm to people of God.

Nehemiah's experience reminds me of what many have to put up with today. Many times there is a brother who causes untold harm to the church either through his teaching or through his actions. Good men in the church begin to oppose this brother and limit his influence and invariably someone will come to the brother's defense. Many times a contentious brother will have relatives in a congregation that will try to "report his good deeds" and try to convince those who have observed his corrupt conduct that this brother is really no threat to the purity of the church. Many allow the fact that a factious brother is a relative or close friend to blind them to the harm done by the brother. We need to judge such men by their fruits (Matt. 7:15,16) and not just by what others say about them.

Nehemiah knew what kind of man Tobiah was despite what his supporters among the Israelites said about him. Un-

fortunately, many of the Israelites could not see the things that Nehemiah saw in Tobiah. As long as Nehemiah was in Jerusalem, he was able to limit Tobiah's influence. But as soon as Nehemiah returned to Babylon, Tobiah seized the opportunity. Through his friends, he was able to gain a strong influence in Jerusalem. (Neh. 13:4,5) We can imagine the grief and heartbreak that Nehemiah experienced when he returned and found this enemy of God's people dwelling in the very house of God. (Neh. 13:6-8) Nehemiah now had to start all over again to rid the people of the influence of this enemy.

Are we able to see divisive and corrupt men for what they are and deal with them accordingly? (Rom. 16:17; Tit. 3:10) Or do we allow ourselves to be influenced by the fact that such enemies of the cross are close friends or relatives? How many times are false teachers defended and followed by friends and members of their families? How many times is the conduct of one who has fallen into sin defended by friends and family members? Too often.

Fortunately, the Israelites had a man like Nehemiah, who was courageous enough to stand against their enemies, despite the influence that these enemies had among some of their brethren. We need men like that today, who are willing to stand against corrupt men who try to exercise their influence over us. Men who will not "yield submission" to them "even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue." (Gal. 2:5)

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THE REFLECTOR is published monthly
by the church of Christ meeting at 2005
Elkwood Drive, Fultondale, AL
USPS 606-140

Address Correspondence and Returns to:
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