

" BE NOT DECEIVED "

Edward O. Bragwell, Jr.

In I Corinthians 6:9,10 there is a list given of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. A warning is given in the passage for us not to be deceived. It seems that some have deceived themselves into thinking that some who are guilty of the sins mentioned in the passage will somehow enter into the inheritance. We must realize, however that anyone, regardless to who he may be, who participates in any of these sins receives the same judgment . He is denied the kingdom of God.

In the last few years much attention has been given in the press to the efforts of homosexuals to be accepted in the religious bodies of America. After much discussion and through the efforts of religious leaders devoted to the "plight of the homosexuals", the gay community not only has gained acceptance in some religious bodies, but some have even been accepted into the "clergy". Many of my brethren are appalled by this and rightly so.

My brethren would also deny any form of fellowship to one who openly engaged in extra-marital or pre-marital relationships. Anyone who is a serious Bible student and wishes to follow God's will realizes that he in no way can accept an unrepentent sinner as a member of the Lord's church. God will not stand for it and neither should His children. We would be quick to point out that a homosexual or one of these other fornicators has no right to fellowship in God's house. However, we at the same time may welcome an adulterer with open arms. It should not be so.

Some brethren are ready and willing to accept into their fellowship those who have unlawfully put away a former spouse and married another (cf. Matt. 19:9). Not only are the ones guilty of this sin accepted into the local church, but some are given roles of Bible teachers or some other leading role in the congregation. It seems that many have the attitude of the Corinthian brethren in I Corinthians 5.

Brethren, as far as the Bible is concerned, the adulterer is in the same boat as the homosexual and other fornicators. If we are to follow the Lord, we will put away from among us such wicked persons (1 Cor. 5:13).

Let us not be swept away with the attitudes of religious people around us. The religious world has accepted adulterous marriages for a long time. Now some of my brethren are accepting them. Will my brethren also accept homosexuality in the future?

THE RULER AND THE RULED

God, who made man, knows man and his needs. Hence, He has ordained certain units of society for the good of man. If order is to prevail in these units there must be some kind of government. There must be those who are "in charge" - there must be those willing to let others be in charge. There are "over" and "under" relationships.

In civil affairs, the unit is a state of some kind. God ordained civil powers to rule or govern a civil unit (Rom. 13:1:5). He did not ordain any specific form of government (other than for ancient Israel) - but did ordain the power and commands citizens to submit to it.

In domestic affairs, the unit is the family. God ordained that parents rule over children and that the husband be over the wife. (Eph. 5:22- 6:4). Thus, a family is ruled by the husband-wife board (the wife has a role in guiding or managing the house - 1 Tim. 5:14) with the husband being chairman of the board!

In spiritual affairs, the unit is the local church. God ordained that elders rule over local churches. (Acts 20:28).

THE RULED -- TAKE HEED

It may well be that all the talk about human rights has conditioned us to think that each man has the right to do his own thing - period. (I am all for human rights, when properly understood and applied) So, we develop the attitude that no one has the right to tell us what to do about anything - that we are answerable to ourselves and to God alone.

If this attitude catches on in any unit of society (state, family or church), then trouble is brewing and anarchy is at the door. It will mean that one need only abide by rules that are to his liking and ignore all others. After all, is he not just as qualified to decide what is right for him as they are. Hence, every man becomes his own ruler, making his own rules.

So, a citizen thinks that his judgment is just as good as those in power - so he will decide what laws he will obey and which he will ignore. He decides what his taxes will be and pays accordingly. He decides who should be arrested and executed, gets him a gun and goes into his own law and order business.

So, a thirteen year old thinks that his judgment is just as good as his parents' - so he demands as much if not more say about when and where he goes, what he does, and with whom he does it.

So, a novice in the church thinks that his ideas are just as good as anyone's - so he insists that he have as much say as elders. He is hurt when he has to yield his judgment to theirs. There are others in the church, who are not novices, who have the same attitude.

Those who are ruled should be aware that they must account to God first (Acts 5:29), then to those who rule over them - in the state, in the home, or in the church.

God, as Supreme Ruler, has given His word or law to govern man. No rule made by any man can set aside God's law. Our judgments cannot override God's word.

But, there are things that God has left up to man to decide in harmony with His will. Some of these affect only the individual himself - hence he can do his own thing and be answerable only unto himself and God. Some things have to do with the

affairs of collective units - states, families, congregations. Someone needs to oversee or rule in these matters if order is to exist. God has provided for such oversight in the family and the church by giving that responsibility to the more mature people in the two areas - parents in the family and elders in the church (whose qualifications insure maturity of judgment).

I am deeply concerned that this principle is being ignored by too many who profess Christ. Even in many "Christian homes" a wife's or a child's judgment prevails over the husband - either because the wife or child demands it so or the husband is just too weak to accept leadership. A child's wishes often carry as much weight as those of his mother. In many congregations who profess Christ, the elders are little more than figure-heads who are "in office" to satisfy the "technicality" of a scriptural organization - but they are not permitted to rule in any real sense of the word. The real "oversight" is often a preacher or other brethren behind the scenes (often not too far behind the scenes) pressuring the elders to do their bidding. If it happens that elders do not do their bidding then it is quickly decided that they "would be better off without elders" and take all matters to church in general where everyone may have equal voice -- even the 14 year old boy who has just been baptized! Or some other strong-willed brother, who could never qualify to be an elder (sometimes representing his wife's self-willed demands).

It is not uncommon to hear Christians speaking contemptuously of the civil powers, of parents, and of elders - all this in spite of God's order that we honor all of these.

Don't we believe that God knew what he was doing when he put the oversight of the family and the congregation into the hands of the more mature people - those better qualified to make mature judgments to guide the whole unit? Or, have we drunk so deeply into the unruly spirit of the age that discourages anyone from buckling under to anyone? Have we become so influenced by the idea of democracy (rule of the people) that we think that democracy must prevail in every social unit. I like democracy in civil affairs, since God has not specified who the "powers that be" must be - a monarch or the majority. But God has revealed that in the family it is husband-rule, not majority rule. In the congregation, it is elder-rule, not majority rule.

THE RULER -- TAKE HEED

Those who rule in any capacity need to understand their position and responsibility. They need to understand that there is no power but that of God (Rom. 13:1; John 19:11; Dan 4) and that they are accountable to Him.

They need to understand that there is but One Perfect Ruler. They need to understand that their perception of affairs can be faulty. They need to realize that even those under them may get an idea now and then that is worth listening to. They need to consider that the position that they occupy by the will of God does not preclude their seeking and/or accepting advice from others - even those under their rule.

Being in a place of authority does not give one the right to be self-willed (cf. Tit. 1:7). There is nothing in the idea of ruling over others that demands any kind of "ivory tower" isolation from the needs and concerns to those who are ruled - nor are they exempt from just criticism.

It is a poor father who would make a decision affecting the whole family without taking into consideration or even discussing the effect that it might have on other members of the family. Suppose I decided to buy a new family car (obligating the family budget to 48 months of payments). But, to do this it will mean that the wife will have to buy groceries on \$25 less money per week. The son will have to drop out of college. The daughter will have to give up her piano

lessons. But, so what? I want a new car! It is for the whole family! The family will just have to understand and go along. Now , really do you think that is being a good father? Is that really ruling one's house well? (Cf. 1 Tim. 3:4). There is a difference in "ruling" and "ruling well". I can "rule" my house - as long as I have my trusty 20 guage automatic shot gun . But, I doubt that it would be the kind of ruling that would qualify me for the eldership.

Ruling at home is the training ground for elders to rule the church. Before they are appointed to that work they should have learned how to rule well by the family experience. They should know by now that despotic rule is neither right nor will it work. They should know that the best rule is that of not "lording it over" those who are to be in submission to them. (See 1 Peter 5:1-8). They should understand that they must account to the "Chief Shepherd". Let them understand that being a shepherd and overseer is more than deciding which way the sheep should go - they lead the way and with loving tender care recovering those who have strayed from the way. By this they make it easier for the sheep to follow them in obedience.

Brethren, is it not about time that we restored the New Testament concept of the ruler and the ruled in the church? Congregations ruled by humble qualified men. Congregations willing to be ruled by these men. Let elders not merely rule - but "rule well" (1 Tim 3:5;5:17). Let the other brethren make their work easier by esteeming them highly for their work's sake (1 Thess. 5:12-13).

There is too much of a "tug of war" atmosphere in many congregations - with it being eldership versus membership rather than eldership and membership. Some of it may be due to elders not being able to be overseers without being overbearing. Some of it may be due to members thinking that any overseeing is overbearing. It may be that all need to be more forbearing. - Editor.

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Worship	10:45 A.M.
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