

A Godly Man in Wicked Surroundings

Elijah was a man who reached true greatness in the Lord's service. He was always ready to go where God would send him (I Kings 18:1; 19:15); to pray whenever prayer was needed (I Kings 17:20, 21; 18:36, 37), and to confront evil whenever confrontation was necessary (I Kings 18:17-24; 21:17-19). He was translated without seeing death, and he, along with Moses, was chosen to appear with the Lord on the mount of transfiguration.

The remarkable thing about Elijah is that he attained this greatness while living in a wicked and hostile environment. Had he lived in Judah during the righteous reign of Hezekiah or Josiah, we might not be surprised at Elijah's attainments. But he lived instead in Israel during the wicked reign of Ahab. He was subjected to the cruel intents of Jezebel. He was under constant harassment and threat of death. He became so discouraged at one point that he asked to die, but he never denied his God.

In this wicked environment Elijah was able to influence others. The widow of Zarephath was blessed through Elijah (I Kings 17:8-24). The multitudes on Mount Carmel were led to cry, "The Lord, He is God!" through his courageous efforts (I Kings 18:39). Elisha, his successor, must have been greatly influenced by him. And even Ahab was brought to humility on one occasion, clothing himself in sackcloth as a result of Elijah's rebuke (I Kings 21:27-29). The message of Elijah is clear. You can live a godly life and influence others for good in a wicked and hostile environment.

When one hears the excuses people make today, it is obvious that Elijah's message is badly needed in this generation. People excuse their failure to teach others the gospel with, "People are so prejudiced around here they just won't listen"; when the truth is, little effort has been made. If they are approached about their ungodly conduct, they explain that "You just don't know how terrible the people are that I have to work around every day". If their children go astray their explanation is, "Our children are faced with pressures that we didn't have growing up". Such statements, repeated often enough, become to many a "license" to do wrong and a salve to soothe their troubled consciences.

We must throw aside our excuses and make up our minds to do right. Elijah could serve God in wicked surroundings. And so can we.

- by Bill Hall

Can We Withdraw From the "Withdrawn?"

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. – 2 Thess. 3:6

A brother or sister "quits the church," or more correctly quits the Lord. Is there anything the church can do beyond urging them to return? Usually when we suggest that maybe the church should consider withdrawing from such a one, we are faced with: "You can't withdraw from those who have withdrawn themselves." We do not believe that those who raise this objection are willfully trying to avoid responsibility for discipline. I have heard it from some of the finest and more conscientious brethren that I know. But, I do believe that they have a misconception of the withdrawing process.

There is more to "withdrawing yourselves" than making a formal announcement at church and then no longer "using them" in a public way. Many seem to think that since the quitter no longer attends and participates in congregational activities that this constitutes his having withdrawn himself so we cannot "withdraw our fellowship" since the quitter has already withdrawn himself. But this solution to the problem will not do.

We suspect that part of the problem is that of referring to discipline as "withdrawing fellowship." The scriptures refer to "withdrawing yourselves." There is a difference. When one withdraws himself it is true that his spiritual fellowship is withdrawn, but it goes beyond that. One withdraws his person, his company, or his social association from the offending party. Surely one can do this even though the brother or sister no longer attends the meetings of the church. Such withdrawal or isolation is designed to make the offender ashamed of his conduct and produce repentance. If Christians refuse to have any social association with such a one and let him know

why he can have none then we believe many would feel the pressure and be restored that probably would otherwise be lost. Of course, this severing of company does not preclude contacts for the purpose of admonishing (2 Thess. 3:15) and/or fulfilling other obligations one may have toward the person.

I have known many who have "withdrawn themselves" who continue to enjoy the day to association with Christians. That association has not been severed at all. It is precisely the company ("mixing up with" — Vine's Dictionary) that must be withdrawn. (See 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 2 Thess. 3:14). Such a person can still be "marked" or "noted" by the church and then each member can withdraw his company (association) that the one might be ashamed.

We can mark and refuse to company with a brother who walks disorderly whether or not he attends services. In fact, the very refusal to attend faithfully is walking disorderly and is grounds for marking and withdrawing ourselves.

- by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

David and The Showbread

There are often questions raised about the incident where Jesus' disciples were chastised by the Pharisees for gathering corn on the Sabbath. The account goes like this:

"At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pick the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the showbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? ... if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless."(Matthew 12: 1-7)

There are many, including some well known Bible commentators, who attempt to use this passage to teach "situation ethics." It is their view that under extreme circumstances it is allowable to set aside the specific commands of God. However, it is a misapplication to use this text in such a way.

Note:

1) The action of the disciples was lawful. It was not stealing (Deut. 23:25) and it was not a type of work that was forbidden on the Sabbath day (Ex. 20:8-11). In fact, it should be observed that Jesus specifically said they were "*guiltless*" (vs. 7).

2) David's actions in the matter of the showbread were sinful. Jesus said that he did that which was "*not lawful*" (vs. 4). A careful reading of 1 Samuel 21 & 22 shows that David also lied in that episode and later repented of his sinful conduct.

With these truths clearly understood, then the question remains: Why did Jesus even mention David and the showbread? The reason is this: The Jews loved and honored the memory of David. They would never criticize his actions. Jesus was pointing out their inconsistency. They justified David in an obvious and blatant sin, and they condemned His disciples for doing something that was not a sin at all.

Clearly, this text can not be used to defend "situation ethics."

- by Greg Gwin