

# The Blessedness of Abiding

**T**he sum total of the Christian life is in learning how to remain in our inner union with the Lord. This inner union was established in us through regeneration. When we remain with the Lord through all the storms and varied experiences in our lives, there is an inner blessedness. This blessedness is known only to those who remain in the place of abiding. In John 15:4-5 the Lord says, <sup>4</sup> “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it *abides* in the vine, neither can you, unless you *abide* in Me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. He who *abides* in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

When we remain in Christ, in that position of abiding, we can sense that inner blessedness. There is a portion called “blessedness,” and it is connected to the state of our inner union with the Lord. This blessedness is that inner happiness, that inner joy, which comes from abiding in Him.

### *The inner blessedness and being offended*

In Matthew 11:6 the Lord says, “Blessed is he who is not offended in Me” (lit.). That is, “Blessed is he who is not offended in his union with Me, or in relationship to Me.” Here the Lord is speaking specifically about John the Baptist. But the way He says it — “blessed is he” — includes all of us. It not only applies to the disciples at that time, but it also opens up a crucial factor in our own experience with the Lord.

When the Lord says, “Blessed is he who is not offended in Me,” He connects an inward state of blessedness to our

abiding in Him *while* He handles us, *while* He allows circumstances over our lives. We know that nothing is an accident in the life of a child of God. As His children, we are living under the mighty hand of God. There is one purpose over all of us. God has an ongoing goal over us year after year, month after month, day after day, even moment by moment. That goal is His Son — that we would enjoy His Son and be conformed to the image of His Son, that His Son would be manifested in our mortal flesh so that we could utter with Paul, “For to me, to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21).

It is with this goal and realization that the Lord says, “And blessed is he who is not offended in Me.” In your union with Him, in your relationship with Him, in how He is handling you, in how He is allowing things to be the way they are in your life, He speaks the word “blessed.” This means “happy.” The Lord uses the word “blessed” again and again in the beginning verses of Matthew 5. We call these verses the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,” and so forth.

“Blessed” describes an inner state, an inner quality of our insides being in joy, in happiness. Regardless of what is happening on the outside, on the inside there is an inner blessedness. This word “blessed” needs to sink deep into us because it is by this word that we see God growing and we see the enemy routed and we see the church emerging. Oh, that we could be persons entering into this blessedness.

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### *The background of John the Baptist*

To understand the significance of the Lord's words, "Blessed is he who is not offended in Me," we must read the preceding verses. Matthew 11:1-2 says, <sup>1</sup> "Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities. <sup>2</sup> And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples <sup>3</sup> and said to Him, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'" The John referred to here is John the Baptist. He is the one who had said of Jesus, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). This is the John who was the forerunner of the Lord Jesus. He was God's messenger, sent to prepare the Lord's way before Him (Mal. 3:1). Concerning John, the Lord said to the crowds, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?" (Matt. 11:7). No, they did not go out to see something that insignificant. They saw someone who was "more than a prophet," meaning that John was actually the fulfillment of prophecy.

John the Baptist was uniquely set apart in God's administration on this earth. The Gospel of John puts it so simply, but profoundly: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John" (John 1:6). So John the Baptist was the unique forerunner that God raised up. He was strong in the power of the Lord to face all the hypocrisy of religion and the opposition of the Jews. He possessed the boldness required to introduce the Lord and to point everyone to Him as the Son of God. He was such a person. When the Pharisees came to be baptized, John called them vipers and said, "Bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Matt. 3:8). So John was bold to speak the truth. The Lord gives a strong testimony concerning this one being God's chosen one.

### *The Lord's handling of John*

Apparently there was nothing wrong with John the Baptist. He was someone honored and dignified in God's administration. But notice how the Lord handled and treated him in Matthew 11. John was in prison, in a dungeon. According to historical accounts, dungeons were musty, dingy, infested places. While John was confined there in prison, the Lord Jesus was carrying out His public ministry. People were being healed. The blind were seeing. All kinds of miracles were happening.

So John received reports from his disciples concerning the works of Christ. As he was hearing all these reports, he was filled with great expectancy that this One was the

Messiah, the Son of God. And at the same time, his expectancies were rising concerning how this One should care for him. It was due to John's self-life with its expectancies that he began to reinterpret the Lord's purpose over his life.

### *The self being touched and reinterpreting our life*

Whenever God begins to touch our self-life — that part of us that gets offended, that gets stumbled — the Lord must get to the root of it by the cross. Otherwise, we will begin to reinterpret our life. What we once believed and held to we will let go of, and we will look for something else to take its place — some new hope. This is what began to happen with John the Baptist. No one had a more direct contact with Jesus in the flesh than this man. No one had a clearer revelation concerning Christ's person. John declared Him to be the Son of God and pointed everyone to Him. All of Judea was in a stir because of his preaching about Christ. Yet it is this very man who started to reevaluate and reinterpret his whole relationship to the Lord because he was treated in a way that he did not expect to be treated. Thank God for this word, because it exposes how the self-life gets offended in even such a notable one as John the Baptist.

Elijah was another man in the Bible who had the same problem of being offended. After he had called fire down from heaven and after he had destroyed the prophets of Baal, the wicked Jezebel was pursuing him to take his life. So there he was, sulking under a juniper tree and bemoaning that God was treating him this way (1 Kings 19:4). This again indicates that some of the strongest servants of God can be found in their self-pity. So our trust is not in man, not in ourselves, but in the living God.

While in prison John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to the Lord to ask Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" We might wonder, how could John ask such a question! He would tell us, "Don't you know, I am nothing but dust apart from Him! Don't you know that for me to even pose such a question, there had to be something in me that was offended with the Lord.

While John's mind was in that state of reasoning, he lost his blessedness within. Whenever our mind begins to reinterpret things and question what is happening to us and ask, "Do we look for another?" we lose our blessedness. Do you want another day, another environment, another husband, another wife, another set of children, another job, another house, another another? Do we look for another? Whenever

we are looking for another instead of the direct hand of God, we lose our blessedness. We lose that happiness within.

### *John's environmental problem*

John was in this state of having lost his blessedness. To his question, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Jesus answered, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11:5). We would say, "Oh, don't tell him that! It will compound his mental agony." It is like telling someone who is starving that everyone else is enjoying a feast, eating and drinking to full satisfaction. So John was in prison, deprived, suffering, and limited, while hearing reports of how much the Lord was doing for others.

John was the man who had been out in the desert with the multitudes coming to him. His ministry had revealed the Messiah to the whole Judean area. This ministry had grown so much that there were "disciples of John." That was part of the problem — John had his own disciples. In John 3:26 his disciples came to him and said, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified — behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!" John's disciples realized that he was losing his group because all were going to the Lord. To this John replied, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom." John was admitting that he was only "the friend of the bridegroom" (v. 29). So all these things had taken place and now John was in a predicament. The Lord had left him in prison.

### *The way the Lord chooses to deal with us*

The Lord answered John's disciples, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." The Lord could have added that those who were in prison had been released (cf. Luke 4:18). So He sent John's disciples to tell him all these wonderful things. Now, in John's mind he may have been thinking, "But, Lord, aren't You going to say something about me?" However, the Lord's message ended with, "Blessed is he who is not offended in Me," telling John that He was not going to take care of him the way He was taking care of all these others.

So the Lord is saying, "John, yes, I am the Coming One. You do not need to look for another. But I have

chosen to do things this way and to leave you there. And John, I am sending you a little message: Do you want to keep your inner happiness in prison? without My releasing you, without My doing something for you, without My performing some miracle to get you out of prison? I am going to allow you to stay there, but I want you to know something — Blessed are you if you are not offended now in Me." This shows us that blessedness is in always remaining in our union with the Lord, under His mighty hand, which is over every one of our lives. When we stay in this union, we have no question about God's ways with us. We are not thinking that He has made a mistake over our environment in any way, outwardly or inwardly. Instead, we are letting our God-given environment drive us deeper into God. Deeper in God we go. This is the testimony of the church life on this earth today — just a group of people saying, "Deeper in God I go." So the blessedness is in maintaining that inner submission to His hand and that absolute surrender to whatever He allows.

### *Bitterness or blessedness?*

There is a blessedness that we need to maintain. We see this in the whole context of the Lord leaving John the Baptist in prison and speaking this word to him, "Blessed is he who is not offended in Me." That means, "Don't be offended by the way I have treated you, the way I have chosen to handle you, the way I have chosen to limit your situation." This is a very vulnerable point for us. You either get bitter or you get blessed, especially when you get hurt. When the self is hurt, when the self is offended, when the self is wounded, when something has happened and the self's expectation has not been met, you can either get bitter or get blessed.

When John the Baptist asked the Lord, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" he was saying, "I am looking for a Deliverer to come in and do something for me. I have an expectation." This was John's thought. But the Lord left him there in prison. And just at that point the Lord said, "Blessed is he . . ." He put the word "blessed" in John's situation. That means, brothers, when you come home from work and the house is a mess and nothing is done the way you expect it, you are on the brink of bitterness or blessedness. You can walk in the house with, "I thank You, Lord! It seemed good to allow this in order that You might enlarge Yourself in me to help my dear wife, to enter into sympathy with her situation." This is Christ growing in us.

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# Christ as Our Shepherd

## Part Two

### *The Heart and Desire of the Shepherd*

In the Gospel of John, the Lord Jesus gives us a rather detailed parable of a shepherd and his flock (John 10:1-16). Of course, in interpreting this parable, He clearly identifies Himself as the Shepherd by saying, “I am the good Shepherd” (v. 14). He also identifies us as His sheep when He says, “The good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (v. 11). There are a number of aspects of truth to be enjoyed in this parable. But for our purposes here let us consider just a few, the first of which is the desire of the Shepherd Himself.

To put it succinctly, the desire of Jesus our Shepherd is to lead us out of every realm other than Himself in order that we would be occupied exclusively with Him. Now, in this parable we find the sheep contained in a sheepfold (vv. 1,16). What is a sheepfold? It is an enclosure, a pen, in which the sheep are kept. From the context of this passage in John, we can easily observe what Jesus had in mind when He spoke of the sheepfold: it was the law and the Judaistic religion in which God’s people were kept (John 9:1-41; 10:19-39). The apostle Paul tells us that God’s people in the Old Testament were “kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith that was later to be revealed” (Gal. 3:23). In other words, before Christ came, the law acted like an enclosure that kept and protected God’s people. Furthermore, the Judaistic religion, which developed over the centuries with its many traditions and customs, reinforced this strong sheepfold that enclosed God’s people.

Of course, life in a sheepfold is a rather miserable existence. It is crowded, smelly, and confining. There is no freedom or enjoyment. Freedom and enjoyment are out in the green pastures. But bondage and dreariness are in the fold. Yet the problem is this — the sheep become accustomed to the sheepfold. After existing there for such a long period of time, the sheep become used to their surroundings. In fact, the fold gives them a certain amount of security. They know the other sheep in the pen, and they are well protected from the wolves outside. In other words, it is a low-risk environment. It is a comfort zone that, though miserable, is at least familiar and secure. Certainly it is not an abundant life. It is not a life of freedom and enjoyment. But it is a safe, traditional life. Out there, beyond the confines of the pen, is the frightening and risky unknown.

But then the shepherd comes with the desire to lead them out of their enclosure to an abundant life in the green pastures. What a picture of Christ! He came to this earth to

be the good Shepherd of His sheep. And as our Shepherd, He has a desire for us. What is His desire? It is to bring us out of our sheepfolds. It is to set us free from every enclosure. Jesus said that the Spirit of the Lord “sent Me to proclaim release to the captives” (Luke 4:18). And Paul said, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not be entangled with a yoke of slavery again” (Gal. 5:1). Jesus came and died to set us free from every enclosure that keeps and binds us. On the cross He broke every chain, enclosure, and wall. He opened every gate to set us free!

And yet the freedom He gives us is not the kind of freedom that becomes a license to live in the flesh (Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:16). Rather, it is a freedom to be fully occupied with Christ. Outside of the fold, what do the sheep have but their shepherd? Inside the fold, they do not need a shepherd. But outside the fold, the shepherd is all they have. The shepherd becomes their focal point, their center, their supplier, their protector, their leader and guide. The shepherd becomes their all in all. But before they can discover how much the shepherd can be to them, they must first get out of the fold!

Do we realize that our Shepherd’s desire is that we would come out of every enclosure to Himself? Of course, today our sheepfold is probably not the law or Judaism. But a sheepfold can be anything. It can be any kind of philosophy or religion — even the Christian religion! It can be a relationship, a career, money, retirement, family, pleasures, or sports. It can be an inward bitterness or hurt that you refuse to let go of. It can be our peculiar disposition and self. It can be an enslaving habit. It can be an old social life. It can be anything that occupies our heart and keeps us in its fold. Are you in any kind of fold? The desire of Jesus is to set you free from that fold — free to be occupied exclusively with Him as your Shepherd and be led into an abundant enjoyment of His life.

### *The Putting Forth and Going Before*

However, as sheep we hesitate. Again, leaving what we are accustomed to and what we have been in for years can be a frightening prospect. What will happen if I leave my enclosure? Will I be safe? Will Jesus as my Shepherd really be enough? Can I really depend on Him for everything? These kinds of considerations often cause us to hesitate. Although Jesus desires for us to come out of our sheepfolds, and although the door to our sheepfolds is wide open, we as dumb sheep hesitate and stubbornly refuse to go out. So what does the Shepherd have to do? He has to “put forth all His own” (10:4). The verb “put forth” is ἐκβάλλω in the original Greek text. It means to *cast out*. This same Greek word is used in the prior chapter about the man who was

healed by Jesus and was later cast out from the Pharisees' presence (9:34). So the shepherd in this parable is "putting forth" or "casting out" his own. In other words, he is getting into the back of the sheepfold and forcefully driving the sheep out through the open gate! And this is what Jesus often must do in our experience. He must get behind us and drive us out of our sheepfold. He must apply enough pressure through our environments, inward or outward, to compel us to overcome our hesitation and get out of the fold. At the time it does not seem pleasant. Yet being driven out of our folds is an absolute mercy from our Shepherd. Have you ever experienced the Lord compelling you to get out of your folds?

Once the shepherd has the sheep out of the fold, he quickly goes to the front of the flock and "goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice" (10:4). What a wonderful picture of our experience! Once we are outside of our folds, we are occupied with Christ and Christ alone. We are centered in Him, we are following Him, and we are listening to His voice. In fact, it says that we *know His voice*. That is, we *recognize His voice*. Herein we can learn a great lesson about the nature of the Lord's speaking to us. When the Lord speaks, most often we do not hear audible words. We do not receive a word-for-word tickertape message from Him. Rather, we recognize His voice. Just consider sheep for a moment. Sheep do not understand any words that their shepherd might speak. A shepherd does not sit down at the beginning of the day with his sheep and discuss in detail the itinerary for the rest of the day. No! The sheep wouldn't understand one word. Yet, throughout the day they know his voice. They can recognize it and distinguish it from all other voices — it is the voice of their shepherd! And that's the voice they follow!

Is this not exactly how it is with the Lord? Rarely does He speak to us in audible words. Yet every day, even every hour, He speaks to us. And we know it's Him. We can sense His pleasure or displeasure over our actions, words, and attitudes. For instance, we might say some harsh words to our spouse over some issue. In our minds, we might feel fully justified that we spoke such words. Yet, deeper than the reasoning of our minds is the voice of our Shepherd. He is not pleased with our words or with the tone in which we spoke them. As a matter of fact, He wants us to apologize — and not even wait for our spouse to apologize first. All of this goes on within us, not by audible words or tickertape, but by the recognition of His voice. It is that anointing in us that teaches us all things (1 John 2:27). It is that voice that we must heed and follow. And this is how we stay focused on Him and occupied with Him. His voice is Him! Listen to Him! Too often we listen to our reasonable arguments, which drown out His voice. Or we listen to other voices —

and there are many — especially when we are departing from a long-term sheepfold. Those other voices, like the scribes and Pharisees, will strongly warn us never to leave the sheepfold. Yet sheep must listen to their Shepherd and follow Him in order to be led out into an abundant life in Him.

### *He Calls Us by Name to Produce the One Flock*

Not only do we know the Shepherd's voice, but He knows our name. Verse 3 says, "and he calls his own sheep by name." Then in verse 14 He says, "I know My own, and My own know Me." Could anything be more intimate and endearing? Jesus knows each one of us by name. He knows His own. He knows each of them individually and personally. And just as He called "Peter" and "Mary," so He calls you by name (Mark 16:7; John 1:42; 20:16). This shows us how intimate is our relationship with Christ. And in His calling of our name, we can sense His tender and genuine care. After all, He is the *good* Shepherd. He is not a hireling, who has little care for the sheep. Rather, He is the good Shepherd, who is willing to even lay down His life for the sheep. He is the Shepherd who gathers us in His arms and carries us in His bosom (Isa. 40:11). This is the kind of heart He has — a heart that genuinely cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7).

However, Jesus does not leave His relationship with us only on an individual, personal level. As important and endearing as this is, He is also after the accomplishment of His purpose, which is to have one flock. In verse 16 Jesus says, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must lead them also, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one flock, one Shepherd." Of course, the "other sheep" to which Jesus refers are the Gentiles. God's flock consists not only of Jews, who are of the first fold, but also of Gentiles, who are of other folds. Yet notice that Jesus' desire in this passage is not to have many different flocks, but just one flock. It is not to have a Jewish flock and a Gentile flock, but just one flock. This same reality was clearly stated by Paul when he declared that Christ died on the cross to break down every middle wall that divides us and to create in Himself one new man, one church, one Body (Eph. 2:14-15). This means that it is the Shepherd's desire for us to practically meet as the church. He does not want scattered sheep, but gathered sheep — sheep that form a flock. Yet *how* the sheep gather is of great importance to Him — He wants us to meet, not divisively, but in oneness, and not according to our background or former enclosures, but according to the oneness that is in Him.

So where will the Shepherd's voice lead us? It will lead us out of all our folds. It will lead us to be exclusively occupied with Him. And it will lead us to the flock — to the

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He wants to be enlarged. This is what all our environments are for — to bring in more of this blessedness. Amen!

### *The larger picture*

The messy house is about the larger picture — it is about Christ being formed in us. Indeed, everything that happens to us is about the larger picture. But we do not learn these lessons quickly or easily. It may take many failures and many experiences of eating the fruit of our bitterness and learning the taste of that versus the taste of life, the taste of blessedness and happiness within us. We see that the Lord's desire at these points is this blessedness — this inner happiness, this joy that is not dependent upon our environment. The joy is simply dependent on how I am relating to my God, how I am thanking Him, how I am praising Him, how I am worshipping Him that everything is good in His sight. And I am content with my Christ. So this kind of blessedness becomes the blessedness of the church, because the enemy is routed in our relationships and the building of the Body takes place.

### *Taking His yoke upon us*

In the context of remaining under God's hand in our environment, the Lord says in Matthew 11:28-30,<sup>28</sup> "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." This is the inner blessedness — the soul that is rested by the Lord. And He says, "Take My yoke." What is the yoke? The context of these verses tells us: To "take My yoke" means to "take all the environments that I place over you." So the Lord is saying, "John, in prison, take My yoke. Take what I have put upon you, what seems to be something you do not want, but it links you with Me. I am going to link you with Me in this environment. Don't miss it. Don't look at the yoke. Don't blame the yoke. Take the yoke, and we are linked together under it, and now learn from Me. Just draw from Me, open to Me, learn from Me. Learn how to say, 'Lord, I do not know what I need. But You know what I need.' "

### *Blaming or maintaining our inner blessedness?*

We can live disgruntled, blaming, and hurting the rest of our life and go to the judgment seat of Christ with blame in our heart — blame for others, blame for what happened to us — and stand there and say, "Lord, why did You do this to me?" Or we can have boldness and joy and blessedness

because inwardly we remained in the blessedness through our environments by saying, "It seemed good in Your sight, Father. Thank You, Lord." We can know if we are ready to be at the judgment seat by the way we are inwardly this minute. If you have inward blessedness right now, you are ready to meet the Lord. If you are blessed right now and you can say, "Lord, thank You! I delight in remaining with You in what You have given me," that means you are ready for the judgment seat. How encouraging!

But if within us there is something other than blessedness, then we will be ashamed at the Lord's coming (1 John 2:28). The Lord says, "Blessed is he who is not offended in Me, in union with Me, in the way I have handled him, in the way I have dealt with him." Brothers and sisters, this is a very practical truth within the context of the church, because when we are together we will all be tested. This is true in any place on the earth, in any locality, in any grouping of saints. There will always be reasons for being offended. But that resounding word has to come: "Blessed is he who is not offended in Me." Then we go deeper into God. This is how to maintain our inner happiness.

In our experience, when we are offended, we may only deal with the cause of that offense. We find out the factor that is offending us and try to adjust it outwardly. We may live on this level for many years. As a result, there is a lot of accumulation of offenses. Pretty soon it starts seeping through and others can smell it. Some of us may be "backed up" from many years of accumulated offenses. You may have the ability to keep up a good outward smile, but if your offenses are not processed through Christ and the cross, eventually the smell comes out.

### *What gets offended in us?*

When I was a little boy, I used to impersonate a well-known singer. I was not the real person. I just pretended that I was that person. I only tried to be like the real singer. We may do the same thing in trying to live the Christian life. When we are offended, we pretend to handle our offenses by coping, rather than by a genuine opening to the Lord. We may get offended again and again. Eventually, no one can say anything to us because the result of our coping is that we are ready to explode. This state is due to the fact that we have never really dealt with God. Instead we are always outwardly adjusting ourselves or the situation.

We have to ask, what gets offended in us? What is it in us that gets offended, causing us to lose our blessedness? Notice your blessedness inside. Watch your happiness.

Don't lose that. Maintain that. That is why the Lord said, "Blessed, happy, are those who are not offended in Me. Stay in Me and you will keep your happiness. But if you do not stay in Me, if you move a few inches into your thought life and your reasonings about the other person, you will lose your happiness. It will just evaporate." Let us see what it is in us that gets offended.

Being offended is a marvelous thing. It is a blessing in disguise. It is as if God is saying, "I am going to go deeper in you now." This is what being offended is about. What happens in your experience is that you learn to say, "Lord, what is in me that is getting offended?" If we can be offended, then we need to be offended. If we can so easily lose the blessedness, then we need to. So the Lord exposes the self that is at the core of our being offended. Just like John the Baptist, you may have your expectation and your idea and your view about the Lord. This is what gets offended. We have somehow accumulated a certain view about the Lord. We have a view about our life that is similar to the "American dream": We are going to have a certain job. We are going to have a certain wife. We have it all planned out. Then our life goes the other way, and we get offended with the Lord. We are stumbled. We are bitter. Then, like John, we start reinterpreting our whole life based upon an offended self.

### *Our expectations and being offended*

Recently I read a book about how to have the New Testament church. The author presented true principles from the Bible, including the matter of all the saints functioning. Diagrams were also given for arranging the chairs for the meetings. The book described certain things that the New Testament church did, and proposed that this is the way the church should be practiced today. This puts expectations into you about the way the church should be. Then you come to the meetings of the church with your expectations. You measure what you see by what you have read. For example, a brother gets up and shares for half an hour. This is not what you expected, and as a result, you get offended. Or you may feel that there should be speaking in tongues. Your expectation is that in the New Testament church there should be speaking in tongues with interpretation in every meeting. But then you come to a meeting and there is no speaking in tongues. So your expectation is not met. This is the case with so many of us. We have hidden views that we do not know about until something

happens and we get offended. John the Baptist had his view of the Lord — "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" In the same way, we may ask, "Is this the church, or should I look for another?" It is so good to expose this realm and to release Christ, to give Him freedom to walk and live among us so that He can be manifested among us.

### *Being offended and going deeper into God*

We can see that this is what gets offended — our views and our thoughts. So let an offense bring you deeper into God, to tell Him, "Lord, grant me not to live according to my rigid expectations, according to the way I think things should be. I want to be in You — the 'I AM WHO I AM.' I want to know You as the living God." In our relationships in the church, in the meetings, in functioning, we are in touch with God. We do not have an expectancy. Our one expectancy is God Himself.

The Lord must deal with the source of the self's expectation. So take your offense, and like a detective trace it back to its source. You will discover that the source is a self that has a certain view. It is this self with its view that got offended. It is the self-life. Then just say, "Thank You, Lord, for showing me that I am a person set in concrete." Some of us live in concrete, but God is not set in concrete. God is water! Amen! He is flowing water. We are like concrete. Our minds are set like concrete. Our views are like concrete. But God is a living God.

### *Being offended and the stones in our heart*

Matthew 13:20-21 says, <sup>20</sup> "But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup> yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles [is offended]." These verses describe a person who received the word. But the word could not take root because there were stony places in his heart. This means we may respond to a meeting, to a message, to the vision of the church. We may exclaim, "I have never seen God's eternal purpose before." We can come out of that meeting filled with excitement and joy because this is really what we should be living for. Yet at the time, we do not realize that there are some hidden stones in our heart that we are not conscious of.

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But eventually the trials come, the pressures come, the persecution comes, a cloud comes over the church for a little period of time; and these things test what you saw that day concerning God's eternal purpose. You discover that there is a cost to live one with Christ, and this cost exposes that there is a stone in your heart. It may be the love of money. But rather than deal with the stone, you adjust and fit yourself into what will keep the love of money as the center and driving force of your life. You interpret things according to this love in your heart. Apparently someone did something or said something that offended you. But trace that offense and it goes back to the hidden stone. You have not dealt with God over your money. Who holds your money? Who regulates your money? Who does your money belong to — you or God? So God touches the core of your being. And you surrender and say, "Lord, I have held on. This stone is in my heart. Apparently I am offended about something else, but actually the root problem is a stone." We deceive ourselves so easily. We are correcting things outwardly, when all the time our heart is stony.

### *Being offended and a crossless life*

In Matthew 16:23 the Lord spoke to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me." The enemy came to Jesus through the soul life of Peter, through his good, reasonable mind. Concerning the cross, he told the Lord, "This shall not happen to You!" In other words, Peter was harboring Satan in his soul, in his mind; and his view came out through his advice to avoid the cross. This is what is offended in us — a natural view of the Christian life, which is crossless, a view that says the cross is not our appointment.

Some have come to me over the years, offended with what others have done to them — "But they did this to me. They said this to me. And it was not righteous. It was not proper. It was improper." To these remarks I have said, "Let us stop for a moment. Look at the Lord Jesus. Was anything proper that was done over Him by the Pharisees and the Sadducees? Everything done against Him was the most unjust, the most improper, the most insidious insult to His person. It was full of deceit. *But that was the cross.*"

What is the cross? The cross is not a nice package with a pink bow, beautifully wrapped, appealing to your sight. The cross does not come that way. It comes with a crooked stick. It comes with something that is against us, something that is unjust. Yes, unjust. This, more than anything else, is what tests the self — having something unjust happen to

us. We vindicate and defend ourselves. This is the level we live on, rather than seeing the larger picture — that this has happened to plunge us into God and to cause us to repudiate this self making one more decision in our life. I am a man under authority. I am a man under a Head. And life and peace is in my spirit. That blessedness and that happiness is right here in my bosom, and I know when I have it and I know when I don't have it. Sorry, mind, I don't have it right now. So we are going to call on the name of the Lord. I am going to open my mouth and praise the Lord. And I am going to maintain my inner blessedness.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord wants to walk through the earth. We are all being tested for the sake of the earth. We are not on the earth for ourselves. We are here for the whole Body of Christ. All saints everywhere are for the whole Body. Their experiences are for us, and our experiences are for them. Today the Lord wants to connect us all, so He is processing us through the cross right where we live. He is doing it in the details of our daily life. Our experience of Christ is for the whole Body. Oh, it is wonderful to keep the inner blessedness. There is nothing like the blessedness of abiding.

— Bill Freeman

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practical church life (Psa. 23:6). Amen! And as the flock practically meets, it has one, unique focus — Jesus Christ, the one Shepherd. The flock does not have many focuses, but only one. Our gathering is unto Him and into His name (Matt. 18:20). Our singing, worship, fellowship, teaching, preaching, and testimony is centered in Him. He is all that we, the sheep, can talk about because He, our Shepherd, is our everything.

— Kirk Eland

## *the Christian*

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