

The Revelation of Righteous Judgment Series

PART 20

"JUDGMENT AT THE HOUSE"

(CONTINUED)

I Peter 4:17...*"for the time is come that JUDGMENT MUST BEGIN AT THE HOUSE OF GOD..."*

When we concluded our last message, we were expanding our thoughts on the building of mental and spiritual superstructures, and the way God brings destruction to those who defile the sacred mindset, the temple of God (I Cor. 3:17). As we have pointed out, He does this, not so much by destroying the individuals themselves, but by destroying those things which defile the temple in the first place: false doctrines, fleshly attitudes (prejudices and biases), and the foolish, self-styled, ill-advised, and independently appointed wisdom of this age (see Parts 17-19 for immediate background). That this is His aim and intended purpose is plainly seen from the outset of this epistle: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nought the understanding of the prudent" (I Cor. 1:19). And as further confirmation, immediately following the passage in I Cor. 3:17, we have these very clear words in verses 18-20, "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, the Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain". This is the theme which runs uninterrupted throughout these chapters. (It is as if Paul was building a scriptural "sandwich"; verses 1:19 and 3:18-20 being the "bread" on either side, and verse 3:17 being the "meat" in the middle. Of a truth, the bread is just as important in understanding the composition of the sandwich as is the meat. It takes both to complete the recipe). With that in mind, then, we will resume our studies.

One thing before we proceed, however. We would reemphasize this line, "He taketh the wise in their craftiness". Literally speaking, He captures, or entraps them in their own devices. The word used here, "taketh", is in the Greek, "drassomai", and according to Dr. Strong, means, "to grasp, i.e. (fig.) entrap:--take". This could suggest a taking into custody, an apprehending, or an arrest for the purpose of prosecution or manifestation. And the word, "craftiness", means, "adroitness, i.e. trickery or sophistry:--cunning craftiness, subtilty" ...a perfect way to describe the covert operations of the old man of sin, wouldn't you say? The old "trickmeister" is always scheming, always conniving, always seeking opportunity to devise an alternative way to God's...even in the most innocent of vessels! He is a hardened criminal, who cannot be subject to the laws of God (Rom. 8:7); and he is constantly searching for an inconspicuous "cover" for his operations! God

shows forth the superiority of His wisdom, however, by allowing him to be caught in his own snares. When believers begin to see themselves as wise and knowledgeable in their own eyes; when they habitually lean to their own understanding; when they steadily build into their mentality the wisdom of this world and its patently Godless humanistic philosophies, or even religious doctrines, reasonings, and ideas that are traditionally circulated throughout the world these days (which merely seem right to a man, but have not been quickened by the Spirit; Prov. 14:12), it is evident who is sitting in the seat of authority in their temples (II Thess. 2:4); and it is obvious of which tree they are partaking (Gen. 3:1-7). They have unconsciously joined themselves to an "organized crime" ring...and made ADAM THEIR GODFATHER! Therefore, the Lord allows them to come to the end of themselves by their own doing. He simply steps back into the shadows, keeping them under surveillance. He waits for the "kingpin" to come out of hiding; then He lets them make fools of themselves by and by through their assumed and presumptuous wisdom (this can happen quicker than one might think, too)! At the very moment when they least expect Him, He blows the whistle, and "nabs" them in the act! Therefore, LET NO MAN DECEIVE HIMSELF! The thoughts of the wise are vain! But if we insist on ignoring the Lord, and if we continue to receive instructions from "the crime boss", God will permit us to deceive ourselves, in order to prove that only His inspired thoughts and ways are worth building with. All other thoughts, no matter how good and practical they be seem, and no matter how righteous they may appear, only lead to futility, frustration, and vexation of spirit, and will eventually be consumed in the fires of testing (I Cor. 3:12-15)! This has been proven time and again, and we all have the "ruins" of past judgments to show for it (...but we wonder sometimes, how long will it take us to learn? Obviously, only God knows)!

GUARDIANS OF THE SACRED SECRETS OF GOD

Now, as we look to chapter 4 of this letter, the apostle opens by making a very bold and straightforward declaration to his readers. After having corrected the ideas of those who might wrongfully emphasize his place of importance in their lives (as you recall, he told them, "neither is he that planteth ANYTHING, neither he that watereth, BUT GOD that giveth the increase", I Cor. 3:7), he balances that out by saying, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD" (verse 1). Though in and of himself he knew he was nothing (Rom. 7:18), he also could not deny what he was by way of election. He was, in fact, an administrator over God's holy "house of mysteries", and guardian of the sacred secrets in the temple (and, we might add, he was not in any way backward or ashamed to admit it, either; Eph. 3:2-5; Rom. 16:25-26)! Praise God! He was constrained to acknowledge that the Lord had, for some reason, chosen to reveal things to him which were clearly not common knowledge, yea, even the unsearchable riches of Christ; not because of his previous learning and knowledge of religious matters, not because of how well read he was of the pagan poets and philosophers of his day, not because he was more capable than his colleagues and contemporaries, and not because of any righteousness which he had of his own, but rather, in spite of it all. This was clearly expressed when he wrote to the Philippians, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom

I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ..." (Phil. 3:7-8). In other words, none of those things which once comprised the supportive foundation for his store of knowledge were to his advantage now, when it came to his apprehension of present truth. In fact, they suddenly lost all value, being reduced to ashes, when God began to reveal to him the supernal excellency of the knowledge of Christ. They were of absolutely no benefit to him whatsoever! So, willingly and readily he chose to lay them aside, and become a fool (as far as this world is concerned) in order to more firmly apprehend that for which he had been apprehended, this prized possession, the wondrous mind of the Spirit (only when the Spirit bid him did he retrieve information that he had previously acquired, or "revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish which [were] burned"; and only when it was deemed useful by the Lord; ref. Neh. 4:2). And though he had eagerly responded throughout the entire process of mental exchange (Rom. 12:2), gladly accepting that which was given him by way of divine revelation, he always kept in mind that it was GOD'S doing that made him what he was, and not anything which he had done on his own (Eph. 2:8-10). It was GOD Who had granted him access into this grace wherein he stood; and it was GOD Who had separated him from his mother's womb, for the express purpose that he should be a steward of the mysteries. IT WAS GOD ALL THE WAY! Had He not been so gracious, it would have been impossible for Paul to have ever laid hold of such divine wisdom and knowledge, or attained unto such a position in the heavenlies! Therefore, in light of these irrefutable and undeniable facts, he realized that all he could do was marvel at the things which God had chosen and was pleased to show him (Gal. 1:15-16), and humbly accept the fact that he was what he was by the grace of God (I Cor. 15:10)!

The reason we bring this out with such emphasis is to make one thing perfectly understood. Not only does this title belong to Paul, or to those who are publicly recognized as being "in the ministry", but to anyone who has been privileged to see into the deeper things of the Spirit. Beloved readers and partakers of the heavenly calling, it is not boasting to confess that WE ARE THE HONORED GUARDS OF THE SACRED SECRETS OF GOD! WE ARE THE KEEPERS OF THE DIVINE TREASURY, WHEREIN IS STORED THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES BOTH OF THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD (I Cor. 4:6-7; Rom. 11:33)! Just as the cherubim, alongside flaming sword, were charged to keep the way of the precious tree of life in the midst of the garden of God, even so have we been given personal oversight of the marvelous mysteries found in God's holy temple (Prov. 15:4)! We have been entrusted with a tremendous wealth of spiritual profundity, all of which has been hidden from the so-called "wise and prudent" of this world, but freely revealed unto babes (Matt. 11:25)! We should pause right here, and contemplate the full weight of this! What an awesome thought this is!

We know that by saying such things we may draw some criticism from the rank and file (as it no doubt did Paul), and some would be reluctant to make such a confession for fear of how it might appear. But we firmly believe that each one of us should do so out of necessity. It is our conviction that a balanced, honest admission of this is vital for growth and maturity in the Spirit, and for the molding of the right mentality within us. But we would also stress that this is not meant to create a sense of superiority or elitism in us. If

this is the effect it has on you, you have missed the meaning altogether. A little further into the chapter, Paul underscores his sentiments by saying, "And these things, brethren, I have transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou, that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"; verses 6-7. Obviously, there were those in his day who were glorying in the flesh, as if they were "not like other men" (Lk. 18:11). They were under the impression that they should be revered and respected as "kings" for their spiritual knowledge, seeing how they were already reigning on high above the rest of the congregation (see I Cor. 4:8-14). With his familiar touch of sarcasm, Paul told them, "would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you"! He made it a point to remind them that they had absolutely no reason to boast. They, like Apollos and himself, were merely mortal recipients...ordinary men, apprehended and enlightened by an extraordinary GOD!

For the sake of discussion, we will ask: Does it ever amaze you why God chose to reveal certain truths to folks like us? When you think about the vast multitudes of humanity, many of which have yet to hear even the simplicity of the Gospel for the first time, has it ever made you wonder why He chose to draw us out of a world of darkness and moral degradation (not to mention religious confusion) to be among those who have even a limited vision of life in the Spirit? No matter what your background might be, it's still mind-boggling, to say the very least! For certain, it was not because we were better than anyone else (most of us can identify with Paul, when he said, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach...the unsearchable riches of Christ"; Eph. 3:8). Nor do we believe that it was because we exhibited some "special" quality or characteristic prior to our conversion (and though we know according to Eph. 1:4 that we were "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world", we find it unprofitable to go beyond that which is written, and speculate concerning prehistoric times). And we know for a fact that it was not because we were independently seeking Him on our own (for even the desire to know Him and to do His will originally comes from Him; Phil. 2:13; Jn. 6:44). But for some strange reason unbeknown to us, God chose to disclose the saving knowledge of His grace to the eyes of our understanding one day, as well as things which accompany salvation in the days which followed (Heb. 6:9). And though we may not understand the why of it all (if it were vital to us, He would surely have told us so), and while it is not an issue upon which we should dwell, we cannot deny the fact that HE HAS. For this we are profoundly grateful! (Denial of this would only be false humility on our part; and since we are His workmanship, it would rob God of the glory due His name. As the prophet asked, "Will a man rob God?") We have no doubt that we speak for many in our reading audience, who can likewise relate to this overwhelming sense of awe and appreciation for the unexplainable. Praise the Lord! Is this a lifting up of our selves? Not as far as we are concerned! We have just come to accept the wonderful works of GOD!

Be that as it may, we must all realize that along with the privilege comes a tremendous responsibility. For now that we have become mindful of these things (or shall we say, ARE BECOMING mindful of them), we are required to keep the way of the heavenly

"mysterion"! This is how our English word "mysteries" appears in the original Greek, and is defined as such: "from a der. of 'muo' (to shut the mouth); a secret or mystery (through the idea of silence imposed by initiation into religious rites):---mystery". This really frames the thought in it's more serious light, doesn't it? Not only are we required to take heed how we build these ideological superstructures upon our shoulders, carefully discerning which things are of God from those which aren't (I Cor. 3:10); but we are each held responsible for what we do with those materials, once they have been incorporated therein. Regardless of the fact that each of us may be on different levels of spiritual understanding, and though we might not all see the same things as of yet, we must still watch over those mysteries which have been built into our temples with reverence and Godly fear, lest at any time we should neglect our sacred duties as stewards. We should have the diligence of one who stands guard over a mighty fortress comprised of the world's most precious stones and metals...for in the truest sense, we do (Job 28:12-19; Prov. 3:13-15; 8:10-11, 18-19)! Each gem is a priceless piece, unique and exquisite in its own way. And every truth is important, as it relates to other truths. Therefore, it is not a matter of how few or how many "jewels" we possess; the duty remains the same. This responsibility is not to be taken lightly! You see, what we have been entrusted to watch over is of infinitely more value than natural rubies or gold could ever be thought to carry; for God has placed the light of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord in these earthen vessels of ours (II Cor. 4:6). This, dear friends, is a peculiar treasure, and one to be highly esteemed above all else. For not only does His divine power, "through the knowledge of Him that has called us to glory and virtue", provide us with "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" today, but also supplies us with "exceeding great and precious promises", the highest hopes and aspirations for the morrow (II Peter 1:3-4). It has the ability to transform our hearts and minds into a place from whence He can pass His righteous decrees and judgments, and ultimately restore all creation to its pristine glory! What an encouraging, faith-building thought! We know that ultimately, God intends for all men to see into this "mystery" realm of the Spirit, which "from the beginning hath been hid in God" (Eph. 3:9); and in due season, we are absolutely persuaded He shall have His way. He shall "destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations" (Isa. 25:7). Then, the blackness of ignorance will pass away, as the light of revelation knowledge thoroughly baptizes this planet (Hab. 2:14)! But in the mean time, He has chosen to reveal particular things to particular individuals on a "need to know" basis. He is currently taking out for Himself a "firstfruits" company, "every man in his own order" (I Cor. 15:23), in order that the purpose of God according to election might stand ("not of works, but of Him that calleth"; Rom. 9:11). Ah, He is the All-wise One, isn't He! He knows exactly what He is doing! And everything that is happening is according to schedule! Shall we charge God foolishly by calling Him unfair? God forbid! For He shall prove the justness of His program by its glorious, triumphant outcome! Shout Hallelujah!

Getting back to our text, we read in the next line, "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (verse 2). What precisely did our brother mean by this? Simply, that we must remain faithful and true to the mysteries, first of all, by waiting patiently for the coming of each revelation of God's righteous judgments (regardless of whether we are dealing with doctrinal issues, a word of knowledge for others, or with

matters which pertain to us in particular), and secondly, by using Spirit-led discrimination in their disclosure and distribution consistently thereafter. SUCH FAITHFULNESS MUST BECOME THE HIGHEST GOAL IN THE LIFE OF A STEWARD. NOTHING IS TO TAKE PREEMINENCE OVER IT, IF WE ARE TO PLEASE HIM. You see, once we have received His mind on a matter, we must know both how to keep a secret, and when to share it! The importance of this cannot possibly be overstated!

If there is anything we are hearing in the Spirit these days, it is that discretion is needed. It matters not how inundated an individual might be with spiritual knowledge, or how ornate his temple may be with "gold, silver, or precious stones", if he is devoid of discretion, it is of little benefit to him. What's more, he can be of little benefit to the Kingdom. This holds true, regardless of how we look at it. For whether we possess valuable insights, and yet withhold them whenever we are prompted by the Spirit to speak, or whether we refuse to keep silent, even when the Lord "puts His finger to the lip", we show the immensity of our folly. If we cannot possess our vessels with discipline and honor, and if we cannot prudently govern our conversations when in the presence of others, we are poorly suited for such fine ornaments of truth! (This brings to mind Solomon's words in Prov. 11:22..."As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion". And, may we add, so is an indiscreet believer with truth on any level! The two are just not compatible)!

Beloved, please allow us to say that whenever the Lord reveals something to our hearts, it is a most natural and normal thing to want to share it. Be it large or small, simply profound or profoundly simple, the first thing we are inclined to do is to find someone with whom we can speak; someone who will be as excited about it as we were upon hearing it. Ah, the pressure can become so great, we may feel as if we are going to explode! But this is precisely where discernment comes in. Thankfully, there are times when the Lord allows us to immediately "get things off our chest". In fact, He will sometimes shed light on a matter right while we are speaking with others, for the express purpose of relaying that information then and there to them (however, even when we are sharing with those to whom the Lord has bidden us, we must be sensitive as to what we should speak, how much we should speak of it, and when to leave off speaking. These are priceless lessons, and should be regular matters of prayer). My, what a blessing it is to meet with those who value the things of God as we do! And what a privilege it is to know those who treasure the truth! The Lord is certainly kind to send different individuals into our lives, who deeply appreciate the insights we have to share with them, and who eagerly accept what He has given us to offer (even correction). This is especially true for a growing number of people who have been called to dwell in solitude on "the back side of the desert". We can tell you from experience, when you've been there very long at all, you are grateful to God for all the company you can get! But we would be foolish indeed to believe that everyone we meet is meant to hear everything we have been shown by the Spirit. It is just not so! Therefore, it becomes necessary that we again take up the cross of waiting, until God releases us to converse. What a formidable task this can be! (Before we begin to grow weary and faint in our minds about this, though, we should remind ourselves that the Lord knows exactly what it's like. He waited some four thousand years before revealing certain things...and is still waiting to reveal others)!

For sure, there will be times when we will be tested. We will come across some very noble and admirable people in life's journey, who we will just feel (based on our natural reasoning) should be "let in on the secrets". Then again, there will be those who we will assume (again, based on natural reasoning) would not be able to grasp certain things we have to say. We may also meet with some who will accuse us of thinking we are better than everyone else, or charge us with thinking we "know it all" (these accusations are not always hurled at us because of what we have said, but sometimes because of what we cannot say. As you know, certain people try to force an "AMEN" out of you, while they express what's on their mind. Whether they are preaching from a pulpit, or speaking to you in private, they expect a "yea", an "uh huh", a "that's right", or some other form of agreement from you. But if the truth that is in you will not allow you to agree, or even to offer an affirmative "head-nod" in their behalf, they immediately go "ballistic", firing slurs and slanderous remarks in your direction. This is but another of Adam's tyrannical ways of teaching us not to disagree with him, and not to question what he says). Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that we find the mind of God in these matters. Obviously, we should beware of speaking things simply because of provocation. And certainly, we should never try to use the things of God to defend ourselves against personal attacks (that's a good way to get "Ichabod" written across your forehead; I Sam. 4:1-23)! On the other hand, we must not allow ourselves to be influenced or intimidated from declaring what God has purposed for us to speak, regardless of the consequences (ridicule, persecution, excommunication, etc.). We must remember that our purpose is to work WITH the fire, in conjunction and harmony with His will...but if we are not careful, we can either suppress the truth God has given us to speak, or we can attempt to speak things which He has not given us the liberty to say. What's more, we can prematurely "leak" information of which we have not received a full revelation (for to present part-truth as if it were the whole can be just as harmful as speaking no truth at all)! We can turn folks off to a message or word if we try to share it without the anointing, or before God has fully prepared their hearts for it. These are all things we need to consider, if we are to be faithful stewards of the mysteries.

PIGS & PEARLS DON'T MIX

One may find himself particularly challenged, if required to deal with groups which are not necessarily moving in present truth. Peradventure God should strategically place you in an assembly or organization for a season, or at least give you some influence among its members, know most assuredly there will be conflicts in the spirit (knowing how some who have been called out of the systems of religion might react to such a thought, we would admonish them not to attempt to "play God", or to assume to know His will for everyone in general. It is His prerogative to do with us whatever He pleases, whenever He wants to. As Paul so eloquently put it to the Romans, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant"? Therefore, we would greatly err, were we to try to unilaterally transfer our experience upon everyone else in the body, or condemn those who are called to a different path than ours; Lk. 9:49-50; Jn. 21:18-22. 'Nuff said 'bout that, huh). Anyway, to whom this may concern, there will probably be things taught in these groups which will be diametrically opposed to the vision God has given you (perhaps the words of Isaiah 28:9 could be applicable here, where it says, "it shall be a vexation only to

understand the report"); and it will be difficult at times to keep from publicly "crying aloud, and sparing not"! But it may well be that the Lord's plan is not to speak to the whole congregation at that time, but perhaps to one or two in the midst (and it might be that He is desirous of teaching you a thing or two through the entire process). In any event, we would do well to remember what Jesus said in Matt. 7:6..."Give not that which is holy unto dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you". Our Lord would not have been "politically correct" with His analogy, likening men to dogs and swine...but then, He wasn't trying to be! He was simply contrasting two types of interest---one, which belongs to a higher order; the other, to the lower. As is commonly understood in the farming community, pigs have never cultivated an interest for diamonds or pearls (except, perhaps, for "Miss Piggy"). Such things are foreign to their environment. Their primary concern is for "creature comforts", and to satisfy their voracious appetites. In like manner, unless God has opened the eyes of people's understanding to such things, they will not have developed an appreciation for the finer things of the Spirit. They will have no desire to change their habits or their interests. Therefore, anything that is of supreme value will naturally get "churned" underfoot, in the muck and mire of their carnal concerns, while they root around in their religious "pens". Because they are so intent on the "swill" of human interest, and because they are satisfied with that which requires but little thought ("husks"), they are absolutely disinterested in things of true brilliance (so brothers and sisters, unless the Lord has told you to, don't you dare throw anything into their "trough" that doesn't feed their hunger...unless you are prepared for them to turn and rend you)! O, the straits in which He places us from time to time! Give us grace, dear Lord, to endure them all!

SELLING SECRETS TO THE ENEMY

Of course, we would be amiss not to mention those times when folks try to put you "on the spot", and force you to comment on subjects wherewith you have no unction from the Holy One. Surely, we have all experienced this at one time or another. They will try to "bait" you with their seemingly innocent questions, and "lure" you into discussions where you have no business. This can be a dangerous trap, dear friends, and one to be avoided at all costs. Likewise, it is just as dangerous to try to clear up misunderstandings which you feel exist. This can lead to a whole host of confusing and frustrating experiences!

If you recall, Hezekiah was impressed with the fact that the king of Babylon had taken an interest in him. So, in response to that, he "shewed them the house of his precious things, the silver, the gold...and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed him not" (Isa. 39). This seemed like a kind gesture on Hezekiah's part, an honorable effort to establish friendly ties and a bond of trust between neighbors. After all, wasn't he supposed to show hospitality? What he didn't anticipate, though, was the trouble that would come as a result! His so-called "liberty" to put the holy things on display put them at the mercy of their enemies, and ultimately cost them their liberty to live as a free society!

I will be the first to tell you that I've made this same tragic mistake in the past, especially during my early years of being an "oddball". When the Lord first began to enlighten me to some of the more uncommon truths found in His Word, there were times when I encountered folks who seemed genuinely interested in getting "into my temple", so to speak, in order to learn what was dear and precious to me. In my zeal (which was not always according to knowledge, I might add; Rom. 10:2), I "opened the house of my precious things", and uttered things I ought not to have (at least to them), for the sake of indiscriminately "sharing the good news". You see, it didn't matter to me who they were; I just wanted EVERYONE to know what I had learned! However, once I allowed them into my confidence (and after they got what they wanted), I found out that their motives were not exactly pure. For after they twisted and distorted some of my "unorthodox" beliefs to sound like they wanted, they used those very materials to build a cross, upon which they crucified me! Ah, sometimes it takes awhile before we really learn how to tune in to God's "discovery channel" (you know, that "station" wherein He reveals the nature of the beast)! But because of those "wonderful" experiences, it has taught me to "stay tuned" during the station breaks! Believe me, it pays!

Listen! If Adam cannot contribute his "wood, hay, or stubble" to the construction site, then he will at least insist on giving guided tours through the temple! It's a fact! You see, this is exactly what happens, everytime we divulge "classified" information without the urgings and unction of the Holy Ghost. We allow the man of sin in us to have access to the holy place, he brings in folks who have no business being there, and as a result, he gets us in a heap o' trouble! Say it isn't so!

(As it relates to the preceding subtopic [concerning pigs], even a heathen king like Antiochus Epiphanes knew that the greatest insult he could possibly render to the God of Israel was to bring a pig into the temple. And so, in 165 B.C. he placed a pig on the altar to show his utter disrespect for the things of God! This blatant act of defilement earned him the title of "antichrist" by many in Christendom. But how much more should it apply to the Adamic man in us, when he allows just anyone into the secret chambers? Just thought we'd throw that in...)

By the way, while we are talking about this, there is something else that should be examined; and that is, the motivation behind what might be called, "reckless rhetoric". Though often in our youthfulness we may blame it on naiveté, we all have to admit this is not always the case. Why, if the truth be told, a great deal of the time the purpose is clearly for personal gain; that is, what we can receive from what we say. As such, the "pay-off" for some may be the chance to look "spiritual" in the eyes of those to whom they speak; for others, it may be the feeling they get from "out-revelating" another brother or sister. Still others may receive their reward by using their knowledge of spiritual things to gain a following, and / or to take advantage of others. Unfortunately, this does happen in the real world. Nevertheless, whenever folks "handle the Word of God deceitfully", and attempt to personally benefit from the "sale" of national secrets (for truly, we are a "holy nation of peculiar people"; I Peter 2:9), they betray our heavenly country (Heb. 11:16), and undermine their own security! This is no less than treason!

Being a faithful steward demands a loyalty and commitment which goes beyond the average call of duty. It requires us to garrison our hearts and minds with all diligence, and to wait patiently for a witness from heaven before we divulge information. We are often asked, "How does one know how to tell those with whom we are to share certain truths from those we are not?" Our answer may not be exactly satisfying to some. We almost wish we could tell you just to look for the light over an individual's head, or to wait for a particular "vibration". That would certainly make things easier! But we are convinced that this is one lesson which each of us must learn for ourselves, by way of personal experience! It is not simply a matter of "sign-hunting" (trying to figure out the cryptic "code", or particular sequence of events leading up to the encounter); nor is it one of deciphering people's "body language" (the focus should not be on the reaction of the hearer, anyway, but on the One Who should be doing the speaking in the first place, the Holy Spirit of truth. The reason we say this is because those to whom the Lord would send us, or send to us, will not always show a favorable response. They will not necessarily be delighted with what the Lord would have us tell them. This can be misleading). If God should give you certain "signs" to go by, fine. We are not trying to dictate what God will or will not do (for we have seen Him do some mighty strange things over the years)! But that does not change the fact that only as we become intimately involved with Him do we really learn to read the inner Witness, or come to recognize the inward signals given by Him. Make no mistake about it: **GOD WILL BE FAITHFUL TO TEACH US, IF WE WILL BE FAITHFUL TO PAY ATTENTION.** Otherwise, we will fail to develop a keen sense of perception, and will be forced to suffer the consequences. This is all a part of growing up into Him!

DESTROY THIS TEMPLE

This brings us to verse 3 of our text, and the stress point of our study. "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment...". This Paul said, in regard to how others might perceive his claims of spiritual stewardship, and the fact that he professed to have unique insights into the things of God. That's quite a comment, wouldn't you say? But how could he honestly say that their personal opinions meant next to nothing to him? How could he be so unaffected by what others thought of him? How could he rise above the caviling and criticisms of his peers to the point that he could calmly accept his place in God, and move at His pace without always feeling obliged to explain his every word, and without trying to go around and correct misunderstandings? Because he had the right perspective on things, that's how! He was absolutely confident that the revelations he had received were not man-made, not concocted in his head, but were of a divine origin. He was totally convinced that they proceeded directly from the mouth of God (Gal. 1:12). This meant that they were true long before he ever came on the scene; and they would remain true long after! The truth would prevail! Therefore, he rested in the fact that no matter what anyone thought or said against them, and no matter what anyone said about him personally, these divine "nuggets" were not going to pass away!

This attitude is perfectly illustrated in the gospels. In the book of John, chapter 2, we have the story of Jesus entering the temple, and bringing a major disruption therein.

Finding the place desecrated beyond belief, He overthrew the moneychanger's tables, and drove them out, saying "TAKE THESE THINGS HENCE: MAKE NOT MY FATHER'S HOUSE AN HOUSE OF MERCHANDISE" (verse 16). Needless to say, the Lamb gave way to the Lion; and He was roaring in Zion! A fire burned before Him, and it was very tempestuous round about! Talk about a housecleaning! He drove out the riffraff by the breath of His mouth, and by the brightness of His coming!

Afterward, the Jews inquired of Him, saying, "What sign shewest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things"? In other words, "justify your actions; exonerate your beliefs. Give us an explanation for the things you have spoken, so as to satisfy our curiosity".

Jesus answered and said unto them, "DESTROY THIS TEMPLE, AND IN THREE DAYS I WILL RAISE IT UP" (verse 19). Why, they must have thought He was crazy! "Didn't He know how much time went into this building? Didn't He know of the labor involved? This house was not built overnight, you know. And HE is going to rebuild it in three days? Yeah...right". You can just imagine what was going through their minds about this time.

We know that while his adversaries were thinking of the natural temple, Jesus was referring to the temple of His body. In effect, He was saying, "Do what you will to this temple. Mock it. Scourge it. Crucify it. Bury it. Try to put it out of mind, and erase it from your memory, so that you can safely resume your silly little religious 'games'. But the truth is inescapable! It will appear again! You may 'seal' it as securely as you can, and you may carefully guard it from getting out. But when you least expect it, when you think you have finally succeeded in suppressing it, it will manifest itself again in another form. Whether you choose to believe it or not, this temple is virtually indestructible"! Hallelujah! Because He knew that He had received this "house" from His Father ("a body hast Thou prepared Me...to do Thy will, O God", Heb. 10:5-7), He also knew that He would preserve it. Therefore, He could rest confident that regardless of the traps set before Him, and regardless of the constant peril He faced on every hand, He never had to get in a hurry. As long as He hearkened to the voice of the Spirit, He could move in and out of the midst of them, and minister to those specifically ordained of the Father without fear or distraction from His purpose. He never had to worry about defending Himself, or about self-preservation. He didn't even need a "mole" in the system, to inform Him of the conspiracies being planned against Him! The Spirit was all the protection He needed! And even when it seemed that His enemies were getting "the upper hand" over Him, so to speak, He still trusted implicitly in the care of Him Who sees all things. He knew that His body was the temple of the Living God; and as such, it was His Father's to do with as He pleased! Now, that, dear friends, is an attitude worth emulating! Total abandonment to divine providence!

While this was the primary meaning of Jesus' words to the Jews, they may also be applied to the "temple" concept with which we have been working, the ideological temple between our ears. It is a fact that during the days of His flesh, our Lord used but few words in responding to His critics; and those He did were given directly by the Spirit.

However, He never once spoke in defense of His doctrine, nor tried to vindicate His teachings through premeditated "textbook" answers (in fact, it was quite common for Him to rebut and avert their questions with questions)! And why did He not feel obliged to do this? Because, as He said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me. If any man will do His will, he will know whether it is of God, or not". He saw it as the Father's business to draw men unto Him; and all that came to Him in this manner, He would in no wise cast out, or exclude. Therefore, it was a very small thing with Him that He should be judged of them. He had nothing to prove to the natural man; nor was He trying to convince him of anything (because only those who were of the truth would hear His voice, anyway; John 3: 921; 18:37)! He simply spake what He was given, and left the rest up to the Spirit!

Allow us to say that for some two thousand years now, men have tried to "destroy this temple"...the theological worldview and thought-temple which our Lord came to establish in the earth. They have judged it, criticized it, found fault with it, and demanded a proof of it. They have come up with alternative views in order to discount the Biblical account, and have labored diligently to remove the testimony of God entirely from the record. But in all of their endeavors, they have found the inevitable truth that you can do nothing against the truth but for it (II Cor. 13:8)! The harder they have tried to disprove it, and the more they have railed against it (to the point that they have foolishly made monkeys of themselves) the more they have actually confirmed it! You see, their every attempt to discredit it has only served to further its influence throughout the world! They prove its validity through their stupidity!

Beloved, consider what we say. If it is our doctrine, we have need to defend it. But if it is Christ's, He will vindicate the Truth in His Own time, and in His Own inimitable way...we needn't worry about it! But aren't we supposed to be "instant in season, and out of season"? And aren't we supposed to be "set for the defense of the gospel"? Certainly. But more importantly, we are to be guided by the Spirit in all things, and at all times. If He should move upon us to openly "reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and with doctrine", we would be in disobedience not to (II Tim. 4:2). And we should never shun to declare "all the counsel of God" whenever He inspires us to do so (Acts 20:27). But under no circumstances are we to speak rashly with our mouths, by presumption, by provocation, or for personal profit (Ecc. 5:2). He desires to order our conversation; and He desires to control our speech. He intends for us to be as disciplined as the yeoman of the guard in front of Buckingham Palace...steadfast and unmovable, unflinching, unblinking, moving only on command. This requires great devotion to one's purpose, and a willingness to die to every wrong motive.

There are those who worry that unless they are always on the defensive, and unless they are always prepared to argue their position, someone may come along, and defeat their beliefs. They may put down their convictions. And it may appear as if they don't know the answers, if they fail to respond. But would God allow His Word to seemingly be defeated? Would He let it be put down? Would He stand back, and allow it to be torn asunder...without so much as a protest? He did, at Pilate's judgment hall---"and He answered him to NEVER A WORD; insomuch that the governor marveled greatly"

(Matt. 27:14)! Our precious Lord Jesus, the very "Word made flesh", offered no resistance to their verbal attacks; there was no guile found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He reviled not back again. As you know, He could have easily overcome them with a few choice words; He could have knocked them off their feet (Jn. 18:1-6)! But it was more important to Him to submit His conversation completely to the mind and will of the Father, than to prove a point, simply for the sake of winning an argument, or to make His enemies look stupid. Besides, His silence, at such a time as this, did more to prove the validity of His claim than any one of a multitude of words could have. The King of glory simply would not dignify their foolish charges and wild accusations with an answer! He was above all that (we should keep in mind Paul's words to young Timothy: "Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes"; II Tim. 2:23).

(Perhaps, we can better identify with David's words in Psalm 39. "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle (Heb. "muzzle"), while the wicked (lawless Adamic nature) is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue, Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am" (verse 1-4). Nothing like a "good" confrontation to reveal our weaknesses, we always say! But could it be that this "fire", this emotional "heartburn" (generally recognized as grief and frustration), actually accomplishes a cleansing work within us? Is it possible that what we feel during these trying moments is the purging of ungodliness and anarchy within our own hearts? This would sure give meaning to the misery, and encourage us to "muzzle" our mouths a bit more often!)

Still, we know that some will not hear of such discipline. They will respond by saying, "Never mind all that! I don't want to miss a chance to stand up for what I believe"! But, beloved, chance is not a factor with God! Or else they will say, "I don't want an opportunity to pass by..."! However, God is not waiting for opportunities to speak to folks; He creates them!

(A little proverb the Lord spoke to us while we were preparing this article was, "There is no merit in being martyred for a message, if it is without a cause". How true! There are no badges handed out for courage, when one dies as a fool...only an embarrassing epitaph!)

Jesus often spake to the multitudes in general, symbolic parables; then turned around in private, and gave the interpretation to His disciples. And even to them, He said that there were many things He would have liked to have shared with them more specifically, but was not able to at the time. Howbeit, later, after they had received the promised Spirit of truth, He said that "He shall take of Mine, and shall shew it unto you" (Jn. 16:15). Likewise, Paul purposed to know nothing but the cross, while in the presence of those who could not assimilate strong meat; but shared wisdom from above with those who were perfect, or more mature in Spirit (I Cor. 2). And the writer of Hebrews said that there were many things he had desired to say, but were hard to be uttered, seeing that his

audience had become dull of hearing (Heb. 5:11-14). Therefore, it should be clear to anyone who has read the Scriptures that "to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven...a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (Ecc. 3:1, 7).

As you might imagine, this could easily turn into a lengthy subject, and one which could not possibly be dealt with sufficiently in such a few short pages. There are many situations which would require special attention, and there are always exceptions to ponder. Obviously, if one has been led into public ministry, be it spoken or written, it would be difficult to control where the word shared may go. And sometimes the Lord will deliberately inspire us to speak some mighty controversial things in places where control would be absolutely impossible (and criticism inevitable)! It seems He emboldens us for just such occasions, and enables us to bear whatever comes as a result! But as a rule, we believe that all truth must be treated as "confidential", until the Spirit reveals otherwise. Any other attitude invites unnecessary trouble, and puts us in a precarious position with the flesh.

Like Paul, there are those in this hour who are taking their responsibilities seriously in Christ. They are experientially learning what it means to be faithful stewards of the mysteries, and are dying out daily to the influence of public opinion. With them, it is becoming a most minute matter that they should be judged of others, or of man's judgment. Their only concern is to be obedient to the Lord, and to speak as oracles of God! My, how this burns Adam up! But alas, as we have just pointed out, this is all a part of the purging process! Their cry is, "God, consume every restless, reckless Adamic tendency in us by the blast of the breath of Your nostrils! Help us to wait on You, till our moment of release comes. And grant us discretion, dear Lord, that we might be pleasing in Thy sight"! So be it!

to be continued...

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