

James Russell, Elder

Dear Scattered Brethren and Co-workers;

Greetings, I pray you are prepared and ready for a rewarding Passover and days of Unleavened Bread. As you know, it is the Season for "Examining ourselves, whether - we be in the faith; prove your - own selves: Know you not your own selves, how that Jesus the Christ is in you, except you be reprobates" (2 Cor 13:5). Paul very clearly points out that we are to examine ourselves. If we are more critical - of ourselves, we will be less critical of others. The second clause in this same verse also indicates that it is our own selves that we are to prove! "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine; for reproof; for correction; for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect throughly finished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Oh, how hard that is to do! "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves" (Phil. 2:3).

We find in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Church; that the people were ready to sit in judgment upon others rather than themselves. Paul, reminded them of this when they were renewing their contract with God at the Passover. "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor 11:31-32). Paul points out that before they are competent to judge others they must first put themselves to the test. Paul states in Verse 28, "Let a man examine himself" The test that we apply to others is a test we must be willing to apply to ourselves! We examine ourselves to see if we have a Philadelphian heart, the part God looks at !

Matthew, an Apostle of Christ, quoted Christ when he said, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete it shall be measured to you again And why beholdest thou the mote that is in your brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in your own eye? Or how wilt thou say to your brother, Let me pull out the mote out of your eye; and, behold, a beam is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first cast out the beam out-of your own eye; and then shall you see clearly to cast out the mote out of your brother's eye" (Matt. 7: 1- 5). Unjust criticism is forbidden by Christ! We may condemn the offence, but like God, we must forgive the offender, extending mercy; love and forgiveness when repentance is shown.

As God's plan unfolds each year before us; Unleavened Bread and Pentecost follows on the heels of Passover. This season is a time dedicated to examining ourselves to see if sin has crept in unaware. Christ uses physical leavening for us to get the picture of what sin looks like. Leavening as we know-it, is an agent that produces fermentation in dough. It causes dough to rise, puffing it up. It is recognized as a corrupting influence. It will not let things be peaceful. It is always causing strife and wanting its own-way. It is in a state of unrest inducing agitation, disorderly and complaining to have its own way. It fights correction and is never happy or satisfied. In a spiritual sense, leavening represents the fruits of the flesh. "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5: 16). Offence comes to those who do not exercise the fruits of God's Holy Spirit. "The fruits of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another" (Gal. 5:22-26).

The Apostle James writes-in his letter to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, the theme, "Practice

Christian living!" "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3: 13-18).

God looks at us individually as a called soldier in the church as the body of Christ. Loose and unkind thoughts and speaking evil of the brethren stirs up the worst passions of the human heart and spreads abroad leaven of evil to those who come into contact with the body of the Church. Those who criticize and condemn one another are breaking God's commandments and are an offence to Him. As I said earlier, offence comes to those who do not practice the fruits of God's Holy Spirit. With the help of God's Holy Spirit flowing through us, we will be able to learn to bridle gossip and hasty, angry speech. James concludes his letter which is filled with wisdom, meekness and mercy by saying, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5: 19-20).

We must remember what Christ said at His last Passover on this earth.. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one to, another" (John 13 :34-35).

Church of God, In Truth

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