

## Chapter XI

### BE NOT MANY MASTERS

The Scriptures reveal that the unsaved of this world do not have the capacity to understand spiritual truth. This is not due to a lack of intelligence or education, but it is due to the fact they are spiritually dead. The believer, on the other hand, has been regenerated by the preaching of the Word of God and the quickening power of the Spirit of God. This quickening produced a rebirth, a birth from above, so that the believer is spiritually alive.

The Spirit of God has indwelt the believer from the moment of that quickening to assure him of his salvation and to effect his spiritual growth, but this growth is not automatic. Since God alone knows the things of God, it is through the indwelling Spirit that spiritual truth is imparted to the believer through preaching, teaching, reading and studying the Word of God. This was never meant to be an independent process but a corporate function of the body of Christ. Therefore the believer is not to forsake the assembling of himself together with other believers, for God has given His church gifted men with special gifts of the Holy Spirit. These men have

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been given to the church:

For the [equipping] of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the [full] knowledge of the Son of God, unto a [mature] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:12-16, emphasis mine)

The man of God, who is called and equipped of God, has the responsibility to instruct the people of God in spiritual truth. Therefore the position of a pastor-teacher should not be entered into lightly. It is not a position gained by popularity, but it is according to the elective purpose of God. This position, by its very nature, requires the man of God to *study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth* (II Timothy 2:15).

If the pastor-teacher fails to study to show himself approved unto God, then it is very likely that he will feel shame for improper teaching; or he may become ashamed of men who do study to show themselves approved unto God. This usually occurs because of the strong stand for the truth that the one who has studied, as he should, takes. Thus Paul wrote to Timothy: *At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me ...* (II Timothy 4:16). James was well aware of these kinds of pitfalls because of his personal experience following his salvation. Therefore James warned his Jewish brethren (scattered throughout the world) against their desires to teach spiritual truth: *My brethren, be not many [teachers], knowing that [teachers] shall receive the greater [judgment]* (James 3:1).

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Despite this warning, the Rabbis considered themselves experts in the Scriptures and the traditions of the elders. They would expound to great length on subjects they thought they knew, but being void of understanding of the Person and work of Christ and without the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God, they did not actually understand the texts they sought to expound.

The pastor-teacher within the body of Christ has a God-given position of authority. Therefore he needs to recognize, as a teacher, he bears a greater responsibility to the Word of God than those he teaches. No one should desire to be a pastor-teacher without a clear call from God and an awareness of the awesome responsibility that goes with this calling. The ministry is not a chosen profession, but a profession in which those who minister are chosen of God to do so. Even so, all teachers are subject to errors.

The born-again believer cannot apostatize, but he can misunderstand a portion of Scripture or follow the teaching of someone he esteems to be a great teacher. In this respect, I have found that when I have quoted a respected teacher (on the basis of his esteemed reputation) without carefully examining the evidence for myself, this is when I have been most prone to teach something I later wished I had not taught. I have come to the conclusion that the teacher should not teach anything that has not become a part of him by a present-tense conviction from the Word of God that it is so.

James made an error in encouraging Paul to go to the temple with four brethren who had made a vow; and Paul certainly made an error in judgment when he allowed himself to be persuaded contrary to what he knew to be true. This act was an absolute contradiction of the things he had taught the Galatians (if he did not, as we have suggested, have a direct command

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from God to do so). Even so, no one can seriously doubt Paul's qualifications or his gifts and calling; but that he acted contrary to what he had been teaching is a mystery which may not be solved this side of heaven. In fact many so-called Bible teachers attempt to justify James's instructions to Paul and Paul's willingness to follow them. They use these events in an effort to prove believers have a responsibility to perform the deeds of the law. This is a position that cannot be supported by the Scriptures, rightly divided.

For in many things we [all make mistakes]. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? Either a vine, figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. (James 3:2-12)

With these words James sought to silence the Jews who persisted in teaching that a man could be justified by the deeds of the law. At the same time James sought to lay hold upon the hearts of the Jews who may have had some realization they were guilty before the law. Therefore James included himself, when he said, *We all make mistakes*. Then James illustrated the truth of his statement with a description of the tongue.

One of the most common areas in which man errs is in the use of his tongue in speech.

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If man could control his tongue, truly, he would be a mature man having everything else under control. James reminded the Jews, even though the tongue is one of the smallest members of the body, it cannot be controlled. Therefore the Jews, in their covenant relationship with God based upon law, could not possibly maintain such a relationship because of their tongues. Their tongues, like rudders on a ship or bits in the mouths of horses, sealed their condemnation. With their tongues they blessed God and cursed man. In fact the Jews cursed men like James and the apostle Paul. They condemned all who stood for the grace of God. The Jews called it blasphemy to even consider the possibility that a Gentile could be saved. Thus when Paul spoke to the Jews in Jerusalem, they listened attentively until Paul mentioned the Gentiles:

And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: and when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. (Acts 22:17-24, emphasis mine)

James sought to show the Jews there was something wrong with their attitudes and hopes. A fountain cannot bring forth sweet water and brackish water at the same time. The Jews claimed they were the children of God. Nevertheless most of them denied the truth of the Word of God. Their claims to the things of God were strictly at a natural level. They apparently did not comprehend that the flesh has no inheritance in the things of God. This truth is clarified by the apostle John:

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He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:11-13)

A spiritual inheritance is obtained by a spiritual birth. Therefore Jesus told the Jewish Rabbi, Nicodemus, he could not enter the kingdom of God on the basis of his natural birth. Jesus said, *Ye must be born again*. This is not a denial of the earthly promises God has made to the nation of Israel. It is, rather, a clarification of the truth that a spiritual inheritance comes only by a spiritual birth.

All of the Jews' natural pride and bitterness against the Gentiles manifested itself in an unruly tongue, which spoke against the promises of God. Rather than embracing the grace of God for themselves and rejoicing that God had also extended His grace to the Gentiles, the Jews were full of petty jealousy. On the one hand they claimed to be the children of God, and on the other hand they sought to destroy the true children of God. Thus the Jews were an enigma. They were like a fountain that sought to bring forth sweet and bitter water at the same time. They were like a fig tree that tried to bear olive berries.

The truth conveyed in these physical impossibilities was given to convey the spiritual impossibility of the Jews' relationship with God. They could not be the children of God and heirs of the promises and stand in opposition to the Word of God. They needed to subject themselves to the wisdom (salvation) of God and be rid of the bitter envy which they manifested against the true children of God.