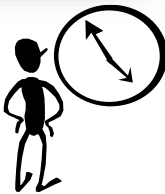


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
(every other week)	

Wednesday:

Bible Study	6:30 p. m.
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Enemy or Ally?

By Jarrod Jacobs

God expects us to make a distinction between truth and error. Unfortunately, many people are not making the distinction. Whether it is due to friendships, or other associations, we find many trying to stay “allies” with all and “enemies” to none.

Jesus said this is not possible to be allies to all and enemies to none. In fact, even the world knows this is not possible. Christ said, *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”* (Jn. 15:18-19). If we are living as Christ would have us live, we cannot be friends with the world.

The apostle Paul knew that Christians should “be separate” from the world. He asked, *“What partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God”* (II Cor. 6:14-16).

Who are our enemies? Who are our allies? The Bible shows us that choosing in one category automatically decides the other category! James made this distinction clear when he wrote, *“Friendship with the world is enmity with God Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”* (Jas. 4:4). In like manner, Jesus told His followers, *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other”* (Matt. 6:24). Therefore, our enemies are determined by who we choose as allies, and vice versa. So, what is YOUR choice? Choose wisely, as some choices we may only get to make once!

Letters of Commendation

By Terry Wane Benton

The question is not about coming to Christ and being added to His one universal body. The Lord adds to that church (Acts 2:47). But, the Lord does not add us to a particular local congregation. We have to "join" those local disciples (Acts 9:26). There must be intent and desire expressed and there must be acceptance into the number. The brethren rightly were cautious not to accept Paul because he had only been known as a persecutor. Barnabas had to step in and vouch for Paul. Barnabas recommended Paul and told the local brethren at Jerusalem that it was OK to accept Him because he had indeed been added to the church (universal). The local church has a responsibility to know who they are accepting.

Some "need" letters of commendation (II Corinthians 3:1). Some are known already by reputation and don't need a letter of recommendation. Pheobe got a letter of recommendation from Paul to the church in Rome. She moved there from Cenchrea (Romans 16:1-2). She was always in the one body of Christ, but she wanted to join the brethren in Rome. She needed a letter of recommendation. Paul did not "need" a letter of recommendation to the brethren at Corinth (II Corinthians 3:1) because they knew him and he helped start that local church. So, some unknown brethren need letters or words (by phone, email, snail-mail, etc.) of recommendation to assure the brethren in that local that they are not getting a troubler or unfaithful person. The local church is to also see that brethren that misbehave either leave or straighten up (I Corinthians 5). Don't confuse the one universal church with the responsibility of local church membership, fellowship, and duty.

All visitors are welcome to come and learn, but being considered a member of the local church takes more than just showing up. In Acts 9:26, Barnabas had to vouch for Paul who had a reputation for hurting churches. Without Barnabas' recommendation, it was right for the brethren to be cautious of this man. A troubler in one church may be a troubler coming into the church he seeks to come into. It is right to check out a person you don't know, and it is right to provide verification (commendation) that you have a good reputation from where you were a member before.

Paul sent a letter of recommendation for Pheobe (Romans 16:1-2) so the brethren of Rome would receive her, welcome her, and assist her. Otherwise, they would not have known her to be a faithful disciple they could trust immediately. Because local churches need to be careful of wolves in sheep's clothing, it has always been lawful and expedient to bring verification of faithfulness with you so that the new group knows you are not running away from troubles you caused before.

A letter is not the only way to verify, especially in a multi-communication-form

world (phones, emails, letters, etc.). Being asked why you chose that congregation was certainly their business to ask, if you were baptized, etc., was checking for verification as to whether you could be brought into the membership. No church stands at the door preventing mere "attendance." But the issue is about whether every "attender" can be considered a **member** of that local church. When I go somewhere for membership, I want them to know that I have been faithful to the Lord, have nothing to hide or be ashamed of, and want them to feel as comfortable as possible in using me in their assemblies and classes. Attending is not the same as being a member of that fold. A shepherd needs to know which people are sheep that he is responsible to look after spiritually, and which are just visitors, attendees who have not committed to the fold. It is scriptural to send letters of recommendation (Romans 16:1-2) and to request such where the reputation is not known (II Corinthians 3:1).

I need to clarify one other item, someone who starts "attending" the assembly is always welcome. The issue changes when the visitor seeks to be a member. A visitor is not a member of that church just by attending. They have to reveal desire and intent, and the flock has to believe it is safe to consider them a member to whom they are mutually responsible. Elders need to know the difference between a visitor to the assembly and a member of their flock that they are responsible to oversee. Visitors may fluctuate, but elders should know the exact number in their local flock. To whom are they responsible, and who is responsible to know them as their shepherds? Attending is always welcome to visitors, but being a member requires communicating intent and agreement between both sides.

Joshua's Encouragement

By Doy Moyer

As the children of Israel were preparing to go into the Promised Land, Moses delivered a series of speeches to help them understand how important their love and obedience to God would be (see Deuteronomy 6:1-9). Moses would not enter the Land himself, but Joshua had been chosen as the successor who would bring the people across the Jordan River. Before this happened, God spoke to Joshua to give him encouragement and help him know that God would be with him (Joshua 1:1-9). The essence of that message is an important reminder for God's people today:

MOSES MY SERVANT IS DEAD

Didn't Joshua and the people already know this? They had been mourning Moses' death for thirty days (Deuteronomy 34:8), so why would God say this? Sometimes people need simple reminders that the past really is in the past and it's time to move forward. It's obvious, yet there are times we let what happened in the past get in the way of what should happen in the future. Moses was a servant who was a good example and

leader for them, but they could not afford to get stuck on what was. Compare this with Paul's point in Philippians 3:13-14. "*But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*" Don't allow the past to keep us from moving forward.

ARISE AND GO

Again, Joshua needed to get moving now that the days of mourning were over. Even knowing that the past is behind us does not mean we feel ready to get back to work. There needs to be the resolve and will to "*arise and go.*" There is a time to mourn, but then we must get up and get going because great work lies ahead. Compare this with what Jesus told the disciples when they had slept through their opportunity to watch and pray: "*Rise, let us be going*" (Matthew 26:46). There is work to do and we must engage the will to get it done.

I WILL BE WITH YOU

God has always been with his people, so His promise stands. Joshua needed to know that God would be with him just as He was with Moses. The fact that Moses died did not mean that God had abandoned the people or the promises given through Moses and those before him. In times of disappointment and loss, it is easy to think that God has left us, but this passage reminds us that God stays with His people through the tears and difficulties. "*He has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'*" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS

It would take strength and fortitude to do what needed to come next for Joshua and the children of Israel. Their task would not be easy. If they imagined the enemies they would face or the problems that could seem insurmountable to them, they could become discouraged and give up before going any further. This was the problem faced by the previous generation who had sent spies into the land only to come back and report that there were giants and they were like grasshoppers (Numbers 13-14). The lack of faith in God and obedience to His will led to their rejection and inability to go into the Land (Hebrews 3-4). This new generation had another opportunity. Their courage would be tested and Joshua would be leading the charge.

DON'T TURN TO THE RIGHT HAND OR TO THE LEFT

This passage is about success: "*For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*" Yet this success was also grounded in their faithfulness to the covenant. The "Book of the Law" was not to depart from them. They were to be careful to do all that was written in it. They were not to turn from it "*to the right hand or to the left.*" They could not expect success if they turned from God's revelation.

And neither can we. We want success and blessings, but if we turn from God's revealed will, how can we expect God to bless us in that?

As Israel did then, so today we face difficulties in a world that has little respect for God and His message. We need similar reminders. The past is gone, so let us not get hung up on it. Let us get up and get to work for the Lord! Know that God is with us and will strengthen us in His will. We need to be strong and courageous, as Paul reminds us: *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil"* (Ephesians 6:10-11). Let us be faithful to the Lord and His revealed will, for the Lord will be with us and give us success!

Do Not Be Lazy

By Joe R. Price

"The lazy man says, 'There is a lion in the road! A fierce lion is in the streets!' As a door turns on its hinges, so does the lazy man on his bed. The lazy man buries his hand in the bowl; It wearies him to bring it back to his mouth. The lazy man is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly" (Proverbs 26:13-16).

Diligence is a hallmark of faith (Romans 12:11; Hebrews 4:11; 6:11; II Peter 1:5,10). Laziness fails to see daily opportunities to serve God, our families, brethren, and neighbors. Laziness serves the desires of Satan, not God. Solomon's wisdom teaches us to be diligent in every part of our lives as it identifies the indicators and dangers of idleness.

- The lazy person always has an excuse for not meeting his responsibilities (Proverbs 26:13). Real or imagined dangers and difficulties content the lazy to remain so (Proverbs 22:13; 20:4). God will use us to accomplish His work when we diligently seek and do His will (Matthew 19:26; Philippians 2:12-13; Hebrews 11:6).
- The lazy person fails to use his time wisely (Proverbs 26:14). He sleeps when it is time to work (John 9:4). As a result, he is unprepared to successfully meet life's challenges (Proverbs 6:6-9; 19:15). We must redeem our time wisely (Ephesians 5:15-16).
- The lazy person does not want to work (Proverbs 26:15). The answer to his problem is staring him in the face, yet he is unwilling to work (Proverbs 19:24). There is no reward in life or eternity for the apathetic and negligent soul (Proverbs 12:27; 13:4; Ecclesiastes 5:18-20).
- The lazy person comforts himself with his pride (Proverbs 26:16). He is self-deceived, lacking the perception needed to change his condition (Proverbs 16:18).

Let us be diligent in things temporal and eternal. Otherwise, *"the desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor"* (Proverbs 21:25).