

Behind the Curtain of Exclusivism

Few Attitudes that Churches employ Inhibit Fellowship to the Degree as does the Characteristic found in the WCG Genre. Under the Guise of Preserving Unity, the Church STILL continues to Promote a very Detrimental Posture among Members.

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It doesn't take long, when among congregations made up of people having a former Worldwide Church of God background, to experience subtle and not so subtle pressures upon the membership to distance themselves from contact with or interaction with or even reading the literature of any other 'brother' organization. Though the '*not a dime's worth of difference*' mantra is often cited by objective observers of their various doctrinal positions, yet a barrier exists, one jealously guarded by the ministry, especially those that are of the 'one-man' orientation. That barrier accounts more to political considerations than any doctrinal difference, for the most part, yet it's often touted as though it were express Biblical doctrine.

Though this has long been and is still a prevalent characteristic, it isn't exhibited to the same degree in every organization. Some are more extreme in their intent to repulse others of like persuasion. But even in those not seen as being so extreme, a certain degree of the characteristic often remains stamped indelibly within the operational psyche.

Identity Challenged

Nowhere does this peculiarity stand out more strongly than in those congregations that once embraced (and perhaps still embrace) the Philadelphia / Laodicea contrast. During the political turmoil of the two decades beginning in the late 1970's, a super interest developed in which a certain 'main body' represented itself as being the loyal, exemplary "Philadelphian" Church, spoken of in Revelation 3, while those who found themselves in disfavor, for a variety of reasons, were regarded as wayward, rebellious and lukewarm "Laodiceans". This "doctrine" gained considerable purchase among members and ministry alike during the final years of the Worldwide administration, prior to its wading out into the swamp of 'apostasy', after which **that** "Philadelphia" became regarded as

"Laodicean" and some previously regarded "Laodiceans" claimed to be **the** "True Philadelphians"!

This odd premise found easy adaptation within a mindset that had already been primed for it. In its early years, and particularly as the exponential growth pattern developed after the mid 1960's, the Church, due to its unorthodox doctrines, found certain safe sanctuary in being isolationist. With so many new converts, and with so few really strong in the Faith themselves, (being new after all) it facilitated the situation well to have little or no direct interface with 'outsiders', at least as it might involve a discussion of 'religion'! The approach isn't unique, as many groups use it. At least, it protects the novices, of which there are too many even yet.

You see, 'outsiders' pose challenges, outsiders ask sometimes 'tough' questions. Outsiders can see things that would ordinarily be obvious, that for some reason had become unthinkable! Outsiders can sometimes rattle certain comfortable assumptions, and if the member is weak, his faith may become undermined unless someone is right there to walk them through the correct considerations and toward the correct answers. But of course, that would put massive demands on the ministry, making it nearly impossible. So, better to keep the member somewhat isolated, at first, until his faith is more fully and deeply rooted! It makes good practical sense.

So, we can see in this the justification for keeping ones' self isolated from competing or disagreeing persuasions.

Ever Shielded

The problem comes when the situation never ends: When the member or membership never attains the personal growth level to be able to directly face into the challenges of Christian Life, most obviously,

to 'give answer to that hope that lies within'.¹ How could a person profess to 'give answer' if he never is exposed to any source of question, whether posed inquisitively or derogatorily?

What is unfortunate is when the membership becomes content to let the minister be the **only** 'front line' individual, deferring all questions to him, and more than happy to not have to face the challenges of having to think and answer questions themselves. We've nourished a whole generation of Christians who rather enjoy being spoon fed nearly everything: Their 'study habits' being superficial if engaged in at all! Babes still, when they themselves by all that time they'd been 'in the faith' **ought** to be teachers. (Heb. 5:12) Paul's comment regarding this situation in some congregations shows us that it isn't a new thing. Nor is the situation commendable!

Laid Up in a Napkin

But an even more unfortunate situation is when a Church Administration **imposes** the condition. When personal growth is discouraged, at least as it finds its way out into any form of expression, some administrations see need to put the clamps on it, lest it diminish the pre-eminence of their 'leader' or his authorized appointees. In other words, these various separate ministries work to maintain the situation appropriate to newly converted Saints perpetually!! This is something we all should carefully consider. What is appropriate? How should we be applying what we know? What limitations on our expression of Faith should we allow to be imposed? What does it mean to live by faith, to walk by Faith? In other words, is the content of the Bible our guide for active expression, or is it the culture within the particular organization we've chosen to affiliate with that we allow to impose its own particular limitations?

The Nabal Approach

An interesting event found in 1st Samuel 25 poses some considerations regarding this matter. The name of the man means 'fool',² which we all too easily can become at times if we're not careful. The passage reads in part: (1st Sam. 25:3) "*Now the name of the man was Nabal; ...the man was*

*churlish and evil in his doings; ...5: And David sent out ten young men, and David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name: 6: And thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity,*³ *Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast. 7: And...now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel. 8: Ask thy young men, and they will shew thee. Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David. 9: And when David's young men came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased...*"

The point here was that in living in the proximity of Nabal's shepherds, he suffered no losses, neither from David's men nor area bandits. David was under the impression that the respectful regard shown Nabal would put him in good stead with this **exceptionally** rich man.

Just Another Rebel!

10: "*And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master.*" 11: *Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be? (What their status is?) 12: So David's young men turned their way, and went again, and came and told him all those sayings.*"

What is usually overlooked here is that despite his other negative qualities, Nabal is here shown to be to some degree a political **loyalist**. He regarded David as just another 'split-off' upstart, broken away from the 'legitimate' political authority of Israel's king. He felt no obligation to offer support to such people, despite the obvious consideration David had already shown him! Making an oblique comparison with the modern situation, Nabal saw no need or obligation to share the provision God had given him with any of these 'split-offs'! **Not all that dissimilar to what some of our modern**

¹ 1st Peter 3:15

² Strongs #5037: "Wicked, foolish, vile or dolt!"

³ Revelation 3:17

Nabal's do as it regards sharing the spiritual provision God has given them!

David's reaction was understandable. 13: "And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on his sword: and there went up after David about four hundred men; and two hundred abode by the stuff..." David then mustered two-thirds of his force intending to wipe out Nabal, his entire family and business operation! We can get some indication of the size of Nabal's business operation by the size of the force mustered to deal with them!

14: "But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and **he railed on them.** 15: But the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields: 16: They were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. 17: Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him."

18: "Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses. 19: And she said unto her servants, Go on before me; behold, I come after you. But she told not her husband Nabal." Abigail, at least, wasn't as hard-headed as her husband.

21: "Now David had said, Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertained unto him: and **he hath requited me evil for good.** 22: So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave of all that pertain to him by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall.

23: "And when Abigail saw David, she hastened, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, 24: And fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray

thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. 25: Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: **for as his name is, so is he;** Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send."

Nabal didn't bother to regard David's protection nor the substance of David's issues with his former master. He was smug in his own self-sufficiency using a 'convenient' regard for his current king to in-part justify despising David and his situation.

Diotrephes' Pre-Eminence

A primitive example of how ugly things can get in the Church is related in the epistle of 3rd John. There, a case of self-elevation by the local minister became increasingly untenable, to the point that the elder Apostle John and others were denied access to his congregation, and those who were amenable to John's epistles and personal presence were forced out of the congregation. 9: "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, **receiveth us not.** 10: Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, **prating against us with malicious words:** and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and **casteth them out of the church.** 11: Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God." The situation, though not new, is no less condemnable in any age! So, why do we allow such situations to continue? Why do we support them?

A recurring phenomenon, where the local minister, or the pre-eminent leader of an organization, sees himself in possession of the 'anointing of God', on Earth second in authority only to Christ, thinking of themselves 'more highly than he or we ought to think' as so many are inclined to do. (Romans 12:3) "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man **the measure of faith.**" The suggestion here is that one with a super-elevated self opinion is not thinking soberly! Yet, how many of these see themselves at the helm of different authoritarian 'Works'? The real issue at hand isn't **authority**, as

most prefer to allege, but the measure of **faith!** And, it's these self-elevated types which are invariably the ultra-exclusivists! It's a natural consequence of that way of thinking.

Messages to Exclusivists

At least two noteworthy situations regarding those not fully amenable to or assimilated within His emerging establishment are posed by Christ to His disciples. Both are somewhat at odds with how we typically would operate among ourselves or would posture toward others. We are remiss to the degree we disregard these relevant instructions.

"I have sheep which are not of this fold" is the first operational hurdle. (John 10:16) The reference isn't to potential converts, but rather to those within God's greater flock who for whatever reason aren't directly encompassed within any narrowly defined congregation. Why they are not is not stated. The reaction of some, that only their own flock or organization is worthy of their interest, leaves the question unsatisfied. How can we even conceive of such a situation, given that way of thinking? How could God possibly have Saints who are not exclusively affiliated with us?

One would wonder how the zealous exclusivist would react to that statement of Jesus? *"I have sheep which are not of this fold"*. Would they deny it? Would they say in their mind, What are you telling me for? I don't care. They aren't of us!

Then, considering the ill treatment some have experienced, rightly or wrongly, some have need to seek affiliation elsewhere. The record isn't always good with respect to our human interactions.

But Jesus said they were his sheep, though not of a particular fold. In order to be, they would have to have God's Spirit. From where did they receive it? Not thru any organization. Christ sees who is His and who is not using different criteria than do we at times. Another mental obstacle for an exclusivist.

Wheat and tares: *"Let both grow together"*! (Matt. 13:29-30) Another situation that would grate against the exclusionary 'purist' is the thought of allowing questionable members to enter the congregation, let alone stay on. The big problem is, our standard for defining a 'tare' might differ from God's. We could strive to make the

congregation **pure** of all 'disagreeing types', but in the process would likely do more damage than it's worth. In our perceptual ineptitude, we'd rip out the good along with the bad and likely end up with a smaller congregation, but one with the same relative percentage of tares still within it! Such is the nature of the best of man's intentions. That's the underlying point with Matthew 13:30. Only God has the perceptual skill to discern the heart's intent.

We have our Nabals, we'll have our Diotrepheses. So shall it ever be, it seems.

There is a natural tendency toward exclusiveness built into the hearts of mankind. In our defensive posture against the world, we often seek the embrace of those of like mind. This has a degree of understandability, but can also be detrimental to the degree we generate contempt for others. In this situation, it's easy to settle into alignment behind a singular leader or leadership, generating a refusal to have proper regard for our fellows in the Faith. If they have God's Spirit, there is only one source by which they could have received it!

Exclusiveness can be another expression of organizational self-righteousness, similar to the smug self-sufficiency found in true Laodiceans! It can express our carnality: The carnality of personal favoritisms, as is described in the first three chapters of 1st Corinthians. Paul makes it clear, that our aligning ourselves with or behind a favorite leader is little more than an expression of carnality! Relative to that, he uses the word four times in as many verses! (1st Cor. 3:1-4) In pursuing organizational 'unity' we can effectively **promote** divisions of another sort!

We need to recognize exclusivism for the detrimental component it can be. The general attitude of contempt toward others of like Faith exposes a flaw in our own faith. *"He that loves his brother abides in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him."* (1st John 2:10, John 13:35) **Ω**

Additional related topics available:

"I Am of Paul, I Am of Apollos"

"Dynamics of True Fellowship"

"In Perils Among Brethren"

"Tares Among the Wheat"

"Considering Laodicea"

Replies:

1). Revelation 3: 9 ~ Those of the Philadelphia-era -- who represent the five faithful and enduring virgins who has sufficiency of God's Holy Spirit -- will be worshipped by those of the synagogue of Satan (the WCG apostate leadership, for one group) -- and they also will be those qualified to be in the Marriage Party. Those other 5 virgins, though not part of the marriage party, some may have to go through the great tribulation, to cause their repentance; before they become part of the 1st resurrection group, or become part of the instantly-changed group; both groups thus considered "first-fruits" into the Kingdom.

2). Matthew 25: 14-30 ~ The five foolish virgins can be likened to the "slothful servant" in this parable; whereas they did not develop spiritually from all which God originally gave them.

3). Luke 16: 10-12 ~ The five foolish virgins can also be likened to those, in converse manner of spirituality, who were found not "faithful" and likened to those who were found to be "unjust."

4). Luke 15: 12-32 ~ The parable of the prodigal son: The 5 foolish virgins could also be likened spiritually to the "prodigal" [wasteful] son, who had placed no long-term value upon his inheritance portion of his father's estate; but rather foolishly squandered what was given him.

Conversely, the five faithful virgins are likened to the other son, who stayed loyal to his family and to his father; and who eventually inherited the entirety of his father's remaining estate. We are thus admonished to be like this faithful son (according to our works and Christian conduct); as well as admonished not to be like this same son (attitude-wise) -- but rather be overjoyed, compassionate, and hospitable (like the parents of these two sons) upon the repentance and return of all the wayward brethren who had departed the core membership of WCG, and then afterwards, when God granted them "light", and sufficient humility was learned, they returned to God's spiritual family.