



The Reflector

Published and edited monthly in the interest of calling people back to the Bible
by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

September 2017

Finis

Ten years ago we revived *The Reflector* as an electronic four page newsletter type paper. We are grateful for the moral support that we have received from brethren. We have tried to share reading material with our readers that would be helpful as they seek the Lord and His righteousness.

A few months ago, we made some changes in our website which includes a blog format section. Consequently, we found ourselves struggling to keep from duplicating articles between it and *The Reflector*. So, we decided that now would be a good time to discontinue *The Reflector* and concentrate on the blog format section. This issue is the 120th issue (we began with the Oct. 2007 edition) of the electronic version of *The Reflector* – a good pace to stop publication. Along with copies of the old paper version, we will leave copies of these achieved on our website, so you can have access to them. Please check regularly with our website at <http://www.edssermonsandthings.com/> for the blog articles and other materials.

Of course, we do not know how much more time we will have to write and preach. We are thankful for the time we have had and look forward to using the time left. God bless.

Ed

A Closer Look at Matthew 18:15-17

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” (Matthew 18:15-17)

This passage is second only to Matthew 7:1 (“Judge not”) in popularity among the replies given by those who have been called out for their sins and their sympathizers. It is especially invoked when one publicly sins in word or deed and is immediately or shortly publicly rebuked for his

transgression. The one rebuked and his sympathizers often throw this passage back at the one doing the public rebuking. “You are also guilty because you did not first come to me, or go to him privately, like the Bible says.”

These verses are not dealing with sin committed publicly. It is the pattern for dealing with private sin known only to the offender and offended. It has two objectives: to gain a brother and to keep private sins as private as possible. Notice the progression from being known by two individuals (the offender and the offended alone). If it is resolved at this level it need not be known by any one else. If not resolved by the two alone, then it is made known to two or three more called upon to help resolve it. If this fails, then it is made public by telling it to the

church. Then if the church cannot persuade the offender to correct it, then he is to be treated as a “heathen and tax collector” (the same as withdrawing and having no company with as in 2 Thess. 3). In this scenario, the sin began privately between only two people and then progresses to public knowledge only if private efforts to gain the offender’s repentance is not accomplished.

Insisting on invoking this pattern to be applied to sin already public knowledge reduces the first two steps to mere formalities to say nothing of being unnecessary. When sin is publically committed it is already past the first two steps of our text. It is being publicly made known as it is being committed. It is known by the church.

Just one other observation about this passage. There is an idea that renders this passage totally unnecessary. If the offending party in a sin is to be unconditionally granted forgiveness by the offended party even before he repents then it makes this whole instruction unnecessary. If this be the case, then the instruction of these verses could be greatly reduced. It would read, “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and put your arm around him and tell him that you love him and *forgive* him.” Then one could go on his way feeling great that he has a forgiving spirit – while leaving the offender still guilty of his fault. ■

The Power of Protesting

Harry Pickup, Jr.

Protesting is a powerful and necessary means in extreme circumstances of bringing men to the knowledge and belief of the truth – any truth: economic; social and most certainly the truth of the gospel. When powerfully done it necessitates honest men squarely facing issues. Recklessness saps its strength.

Some protestations are weak or, at least, are not as powerful as they could or should be. The failure, or at best, partial success of some protestants is due to the weakness of the protesting not to the strength of the thing protested against.

As Christians protesting every human innovation within the gospel of salvation it will be helpful to notice

political protestants, with their weakness and failures. Mr. John Garrity, a recognized American historian, has analyzed the weaknesses of two great American political Protestants: Mr. Williams Jennings Bryan and Mr. George W. Perkins, a rich, though little known, backer of President Theodore Roosevelt. These men mightily and vigorously opposed what they believed were serious threats to our nation. But they failed in their protesting.

Mr. Garrity gave these as Mr. Bryan's weaknesses: (1) His style of protesting was more emotional than logical. Over balanced emotional oratory has power to move at the time spoken. But it loses some of its power in future contemplation. It is like ginger ale left uncapped overnight in the refrigerator. The next glass has lost its “fizz.” (2) Mr. Bryan was unable to realize that America was changing from an agrarian society to an industrial one. Changes of form and expression are not always bad. But changes of substance and principle always are had, providing, of course, such were originally right. To protest against the former may not get at the heart of the matter which the powerful protestant always needs to do. (3) Bryan never did have a complete grasp of the thing he was protesting against. The protestant must clearly understand how the thing protested against fundamentally violates a principle of right, truth or justice.

Mr. Garrity listed Mr. Perkin's chief weaknesses as these: (1) He was headstrong. All capable protestants, as God told Ezekiel, must have “hardheads.” But there is considerable difference between having a “hard-head” and being “head-strong.” (2) His decisiveness and dedication often led him to ignore others. The protestant is not reforming principles but people who hold principles. By the very nature of their work such men must be rugged individuals. But such men are prone to hear only their own voice. This exposes them to the great weakness of arrogance and nullifies the possible benefits of other's judgment. (3) The real nature of the thing he was trying to protest against essentially escaped him. The protestant must not merely cut across the periphery. He must go to the heart of the problem. (4) “He believed that progress depended upon men learning to work together, but he could not work in harness with others at the task of making a better world.” The protestant must by nature be willing to risk the disapproval of the crowd. But he must cultivate the disposition and ability to be a “fellow-worker.”

Every gospel preacher has found it necessary to take

the extreme action of powerfully protesting against a serious and far-reaching wrong. It would be well for all of us to examine our protestings to see if our manner of doing such has, to some degree, sapped the strength of this work. Much protesting is being done today. The work of such gravity demands our very best.

“Protesting” is defined by Webster as, “to assert earnestly especially in the face of opposition.” Several things are involved in this definition. (1) The protestant states his position positively and with all possible clarity. In his positive assertion he seeks to speak as literally as possible. First he wants to be understood. (2) He asserts earnestly. The gravity of the situation demands the most dignified and serious treatment personally possible. Zeal is a part of protesting earnestly; the zeal of balanced concern. (3) The protestant is not merely warning. He is seeking to turn men from error to truth. (4) The gravity of the matter under protest and the import of the consequences cause the protestant to pick up the gauntlet which the opposition has hurled down. However, we must not allow concern for serious error to lead us to do some things which are not within the confines of protesting powerfully.

Protesting is often confused with things which have some similarity to it but in spite of the similarity are really not protesting. For example (a) It is not re-acting. Reacting is almost an involuntary thing. As when a foreign object comes toward the eye and the eye closes involuntarily. Protesting is a deliberate thing. As when a football player assumes a deliberate position. (b) It is not retaliating. That is repaying evil with a similar evil. Protesting is urging that error be replaced with truth. (c) It is not avenging. For this belongs only to God. The purpose of protesting is just as much remedial as it is diagnostic. It is not punitive but corrective.

While protesting calls principles in question it is more serious than “questionings.” (Mark 8:11.) It is more severe than correction. (II Tim. 3:16.) It is more vigorous than criticism. It is more ominous than warning. It is necessarily a part of restoration.

The Old Testament prophets are perfect examples of powerfully protesting. Their work was a climactic effort on God's part to get men to realize the seriousness of God's charges against them: to make them see their unfaithfulness as God saw it. The clear and powerful denunciations of Amos are precisely what I have in mind as protesting. Paul's public resistance of Peter — Gal. 2:11f — is a New Testament example of the same thing.

The sin of Peter was not an isolated case of sin. It was an open sin directly contradictory to the plain truth of the gospel, which would have given impetus to the then threatening Judaistic party. Men of considerable influence who keep on sinning must be publicly rebuked for the good of other men as well as the salvation of their own souls. I Tim. 5:20. The mouths of gainsayers must be stopped at all costs by men who are overseeing the church of God. Titus 1:9.

When is protesting necessary? When all else has failed to deter men from sin. Amos 4:6f. tells what God had done to bring Israel to her senses. In spite of all these things, “yet ye have not returned unto me, saith Jehovah.” The powerful protest of Gad through the prophet is all that is left before destruction. Such is necessary when this is the only way to get the attention of the people. The sudden interruption of the young prophet before Jereboam, who was offering incense at the new altar in Bethel, was necessary in order for the sinning people to really hear God's voice, and thus his will regarding this matter. (I Kings 13.)

Such extreme action becomes necessary when the spiritual contagion is spreading swiftly and is therefore sure, unless checked, to wreak widespread harm. For this reason Paul had to protest Peter's sin in Antioch lest this growing issue engulf the whole church. Protesting is necessary when serious incidents precipitate an evident emergency. As in the case of Esther protesting to her husband against the plot of Haman against the Jews. Her extreme action had to be taken for time was against her.

What Does God Protest?

1. **God protests ungodliness.** Ungodliness is disrespect for God: defiance of Him as a person. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” (Rom. 1:18.)

[a] **Judah defied the person of God by forsaking Him** who is the fountain of living water and hewing out for herself broken cisterns. (Jer. 2:13.) She had openly disrespected God by seeking the waters of the Nile — Egypt — and the Euphrates — Assyria. God said that Judah would be “fed upon” by those nations in whom she had sought refuge.

[b] **Israel defied the care and concern of God as a rebellious son.** (Hos. 11:1-4.) God loved and cared for Israel as a child is loved by a father. As a father teaches a beloved son to walk so did God with Israel. And when the child stumbles the father lifts the child in

tender arms to heal the hurt. So did God to Israel. In spite of all such wonderful care Israel forsook God for images — “the Baalim.” The voice of God mightily protested through Hosea. The difficulty of punishing even the rebellious child is heard in this plaintiff plea: “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim; how shall I cast thee off, Israel.”

[c] **Israel defied the pleasure of God. God's word reveals his pleasure.** He is pleased only when man fulfills God's purposes. God's purposes are always best and bring about the most sublime happiness and joy. Lives lived inharmoniously with God's purposes demonstrate defiance of God. Sacrifices offered without regard for God's pleasure are protested against by Himself as a defiance of His person.

Amos said at Gilgal and Bethel Israel “multiplied transgressions” because they “pleased” themselves and not God. Jehovah who “formeth the mountains,” “createth the wind,” “declareth unto man what is his thought,” “maketh morning darkness” and “treadeth upon the high places of the earth,” protested Israel's transgressions and sought her return but “yet ye have not returned unto me.”

[d] **Men defy God by defying his word.** “Profane babblings proceed further ungodliness.” (2 Tim. 2:16) God's word is not revealed to be discussed in order to be tested and evaluated. It is given to be studied in order to learn and be obeyed.

Jude 15 sums up what we have been saying about ungodliness being a defiance of the person of God. “...to execute judgment upon all and to convict all the ungodly (defiance of his person) of all their works of ungodliness (defiance of his will) which they have ungodly (in a defiant manner) wrought, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him (defiant speech).” (Comments in parentheses are mine.) Against such the most powerful protesting must be delivered.

2. God protests against lawlessness. Lawlessness is a defiance of the will of God. In Acts 2:23 Peter protested against the crucifixion of Christ by “lawless men.” He was illegally tried by men who had no regard for justice and truth. The charges brought against him were untrue, being born out of his accusers' prejudices. His accusers took the law into their own hands in order to gain their own way.

At the judgment Christ will denounce those who have not done his will as “workers of lawlessness” — “iniquity.” His sentence will be, “depart from me.”

(Matt. 7:23.)

It is unlawful to mix the holy with the common. Priests of the Old Covenant who put no distinction between holy and common things and taught the people so were cut off from God as his priest. (Ezekiel 44:11.) Paul taught the Corinthians that the yoking of believers and unbelievers in service to God is unlawful because it unites things which have nothing at all in common. For the “holy nation” of the New Testament to be united with the secular nation is unlawful. The church and the world are as different as the ox and the ass. They are different in nature, design and purpose. (II Cor, 6:14f.)

John the Baptist, a most powerful protestant, scathingly denounced the marriage of Herod and Herodias in these words: “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.” These people had openly flaunted God's marriage law. Such defiance could not be ignored. Such public immorality could work wide spread harm.

3. God protests against unrighteousness. The word unrighteousness often refers to the unjust and wrong relationship between human beings. Rom. 1:18. It is disregard for human rights and disrespect for human persons. A respect for God necessarily produces respectful treatment of and regard for men.

The Pharisees and Scribes were condemned for leaving undone the “weightier matters of the law.” (Matt. 23:23.) These were “justice” — right and honorable dealings between persons; “mercy” — compassion shown to men because of the rich reception of mercy such men receive from God; “faith” — a faithful and trustworthy dealing with one's fellowman because of the faith one has in a trustworthy God.

One cannot be wrong with his fellowman and be right with God. To hate one's brother is to walk in darkness. When one walks in darkness he is not in fellowship with God. Those who “do righteousness” are begotten of God. I John 2:27. Strife and factionalism are detestable things to God. Things which contribute to them must be protested with all the power of saving truth. With the power of truth as his weapon, the interest in and love for souls as his compelling motivation, there is absolutely no justification for the “man of God” to protest in any way which will reflect upon what he is, “God's man.”

Gospel Guardian, June 4, 1964 ■