



Lovely Lord of the Lord's Day

10. Pious Pains in the Neck

Our Creator alone must rule in the home, the church, and the individual life.

"We're going to Peanut Park for Sabbath dinner, children." The words were pleasantly spoken but with a certain finality.

Ada's father was spending a few weeks with his daughter and her three children. Father meant no harm; he just overlooked the fact that his daughter sometimes enjoyed being counselled with. She and the children had always planned things together, especially since her husband had passed away. But when Grandpa visited, everything went the way he wanted it. There was never any choice.

This irritated Ada and frustrated the girls. "But," Mother would tell the girls, "Grandpa won't be here very long. Let's do it his way for now."

Ada's father was an intelligent, strong-willed man. In almost all respects he was a fine Christian. His big problem, however, was his overbearing nature. He tried to impose convictions on everyone else. He allowed no free discussion of an issue. When his mind was made up, that was final! There was never any room for a second-best choice. He displayed what some call "one-sided possessiveness."

It is what I call a "mark-of-the-beast" principle. It says in Revelation 13:16 that "he causeth" or pressures or makes the choice for others, instead of permitting them to make their own decisions in matters of faith and conscience.

In a church where there are a number of such Christians, each one desiring to do his very best, yet refusing anyone else the freedom of choice, there will be discord. A case in point is a church which was being constructed by a lovely church family. Some of these men apparently had never heard of a "second best" and that it could be a good idea to allow another man to choose what might be considered poor taste.

A dispute arose over the position of the baptistery. The division became so sharp that when we held a series of meetings with them, the matter showed up. One group came to me hoping I would place my influence on their side of the question. Then the other side came, hoping for the same.

I explained that the important things are those of the spirit. While material things have their place, a second or even third best is much to be preferred over disunity.

"This is my church, and I'm going to have the baptistery where it should be," was the attitude of one man. He was displaying "one-sided possessiveness." How refreshing it would have been had each one said in his heart, "This is their church too, and I will support the program regardless. As far as I am concerned, this would be the best place for the baptistery. But I want unity more than I want my superior judgment followed."

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When people want to make choices for others, we call it a "mark-of-the-beast" principle. "He causeth," that is "maketh," their decisions for them.

When in days of old Israel the people asked for a king, God gave them their choice even though it was not the wisest one. Think of it, God Himself allowed man the freedom of choice.

A mother came to me for counsel. She loved and believed in Christian education. She also knew the value of our church schools where the Bible is taught to the children in every grade from the first year. Her husband, however, was of another faith and did not fully understand the advantages of Christian education.

During the conversation, the wife exclaimed. "I want my children in church school. "

"My children?" I thought to myself, "Can this really be? Can ladies of a certain faith have children all by themselves?"

This lady's conversation caused me to be inclined to think that her attitude of "my children" was the very reason why her husband was objecting to their children being in the church's day school. Can one blame him for feeling the way he did? He didn't want the children have the same possessive attitude. This fine lady had confused the issue. The fact that the church's day school was the very best place for her children was equated in her mind with her being the sole one, if need be, to make the decision.

As people come to me for counsel, I ask God for the gift of His Holy Spirit, and for wisdom; wisdom to present aright the principles for the inquirer to follow. I asked the inquiring lady if she and her husband had disputes over other details of family and business matters. She replied that they often did. Then I pointed out that if she would create an attitude of un-possessiveness in lesser matters, her husband would yield to her humble and sincere desires in such an important matter as the education of their children.

It is my conviction that these children would have been in the school of the mother's choice had she not taken upon herself the burden of making so many previous choices which should rightfully have been made by both of them.

One good woman persuaded her Baptist husband to come with her to visit me for counsel. Their home was about to break up. They had barely been seated when this fine, well-meaning woman began to point out her husband's errors. One was that he was not setting a good example before "my children."

"He does not so much as kneel when we have family prayer," she exclaimed sorrowfully, "What influence will this have on the children?"

I pointed out that Baptist people often sit or stand when they pray, while we usually kneel, and that while it would, of course, be a better example if both parents followed the same practice, nevertheless there are some things even more important than the physical position in prayer.

After some discussion of their problems, her Baptist husband came up with his diagnosis of their case, "The trouble in our home is that my wife insists that I serve the Lord her way."

When dear ones coming for counsel are guilty of possessiveness, I rebuke them as kindly as possible. At times this is part of the minister's duty.

A man in Texas related to me an experience that he had with his wife. One night they were dancing at a night club. Neither of them was a Christian. He was dancing with another woman; she with another man. At about 12:30 the husband suddenly gave his heart to the Lord. At 12:40 he left his partner on the dance floor and found his wife.

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The man told his wife how he had just given his heart to the Lord. Then, pointing to the clock on the ballroom wall, he said in a tone that was firm and decisive, "Do you see the clock on the wall? I will give you until the clock strikes one to follow my example. If you have not become a Christian by then, I shall immediately divorce you."

She didn't, and he did!

The tragedy of tragedies was that he became a member of our church and lived to boast about it! He was practicing a "mark-of-the-beast" principle.

Was I the first one he told about this terrible event? I hope so. And I hope I was the last one too. This man could well have made the confession that came from the lips of another man who had found what his trouble was. Said he, "I was working like the devil for the Lord!"

When I was still pastoring churches, a little mother-in-law came to me apparently seeking counsel. She was greatly troubled. Her son's family was in very poor financial circumstances. Living in the home with them, she observed a great deal of waste on the part of her daughter-in-law. For one thing, her daughter-in-law had several cats. These cats consumed food which the children needed. The mother-in-law then put the question to me: "Is it right to take food the children need and give it to the cats?"

Of course I had to agree that this was not wise. Then she opened fire on her daughter-in-law. "I have told her repeatedly not to do it, but what I say doesn't do a bit of good."

"But you are the last one on earth that should be telling her," I instructed.

"Why?" she demanded, "My son would not even have a house to live in if it weren't for me."

"Is it your house?" I asked.

"It belongs to my son and to me," she replied.

I recognized immediately that this woman tried to "possess" the house, the home, and its occupants.

"The Bible says that your son and his wife are one," I began, "and they two are one flesh. It commands him to do nothing that will bring about the situation that now exists in their home. He is commanded to honor you and yet to leave father and mother."

Then the little woman turned on me, "Why do you tell me that?"

I replied, "I am not telling you; God told us, and I am simply trying to obey what He commanded us all."

Still she was not satisfied. She thought I had had something to do with the instruction. "No," I replied, "I was not so much as consulted when this passage was written."

This poor woman had confused the issue. She clearly saw that money was going to waste in the form of food for the cats. She knew the children needed it. But she did not realize that the attitude of domination would not work. If the daughter-in-law chose second best, then the mother-in-law should not try to force her own good judgment on the daughter-in-law.

Oh how often good, well-meaning folk fail to understand that their friends have a sovereign power of choice. And if through inferior judgment they select second best, third best, or worse, this is their privilege. We are not to permit ourselves to present a cantankerous or nagging spirit.

A few days later the daughter-in-law came to see me. She was a beautiful meek young woman. She was most hesitant to so much as imply that there was trouble in the home. She started, rather, to discuss her need for prayer. She commented meditatively, rubbing her head, "Pastor, I am feeling ill. I wonder if you would pray for me. I have a severe pain in the neck."

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I felt I should get to the problem at once, so I said, "Yes, I know. She was over to see me."

With that we were into the needed discussion. Later her husband, the son of the little older woman, came over. He also hesitated to discuss the real problem of his mother's possessiveness. He put his hand to his brow and said, "I have a terrible headache. It feels the most peculiar," he continued. "In fact, my head feels sort of empty from the eyes up."

I agreed in a way not to hurt his feelings. Any man who will succumb to letting another possess him, his home, and his family must have rooms to rent somewhere! But he did not succumb for long. Finally he had to call a halt to her intrusions.

The little lady was infuriated and rushed over to see me again. Nothing I could say would enlighten her. What a lovely relationship might have been theirs had she taken a quiet, un-possessive attitude. She could have supplied the needed fellowship, so essential for the spirit of those within, without the cats. She could have been so sweet that her son and daughter would have come to her for counsel. She could have placed the grandchildren on her lap and told them stories which would have bound their hearts forever to both their mother and father.

One day my telephone rang and upon answering it, the very weak voice of this little old lady was heard on the other end.

"I'm desperately ill," she said in a very low, painful voice. Then came the urgent request for prayer. Things had deteriorated to such a state that I felt compelled to take action this time. My duty seemed clear.

"I will pray for you under one condition only," I answered calmly and firmly.

"But I am almost dead!" The voice broke.

"I believe the Lord will heal you." I injected. "but I cannot feel free to request His healing for you unless you make a definite promise to God and to me. You must be willing to move out of the lives and home of your son's family the moment God heals you."

As I look back on the experience, I believe I should have been kinder to the old lady even in doing my duty of rebuking her for meddling. But I was thoroughly aroused, realizing that she was bringing unnecessary burdens on this young, struggling family.

The lady agreed. She was afraid she would die. It seems that people are then willing to make decisions otherwise well-nigh impossible. I prayed for her over the telephone, and she was almost instantly healed! Overjoyed at God's mercy and feeling that it was a token to her that my counsel, though at times severe, was, nevertheless of God, she moved out, found work, and was happy.

A few days later the daughter-in-law came back to see me. She looked better, talked better, and walked better! She came to tell me how much better she felt and how much happier the home was.

"The pain in the neck is gone," she exclaimed, and she was not referring to her mother-in-law. Yet the mother-in-law had learned her lesson, and the precious family's health was preserved too. It was a difficult ordeal, but victory resulted.

One may wonder why after we have shared so much instruction on love, kindness, and gentleness we should have rebuked the mother-in-law as we did. This deserves an answer and has been spelled out in the scriptural summary of this chapter. But let us add another experience with it. It is an experience of a precious woman who was making love to a member of my flock. The man was married, and she was a married woman.

I did all within my power to kindly encourage a separation, but to no avail. At this point I did what the Bible commands the servant of God to do at times, I wrote a letter of rebuke to her.

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She later exclaimed. "It is very hard for me to understand how the man who wrote the book 'Path to the Heart', could also have written such a strong rebuking letter to me."

The wicked at the last great day will lament when they see Jesus coming. They will be amazed at an angry Lamb. They will ask for the rocks and mountains to hide them from the "wrath of the Lamb." They had known only one side of the character of God. They seemed to have ignored the fact that the One who died on Calvary as the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" is also to sit in judgment on the nations. "The Father. . . hath committed all judgment unto the Son."

Through the years and in our many works we have dealt much on the love of God. But there are times when love must also reprove or else it is no true love. The difficulty with most professed Christians is that the pattern of their lives is one of continual nagging and reproof, whereas such action should be the exception to the rule.

And furthermore, let no one gain the impression that when we suggest quietness and silence this means we are not to be joyful witnesses for our Lord. We are to share the good news of His long-suffering. His mercy toward us is a testimony we may share with all who are eager to identify with the victory God has given us.

Can we not pray, "Lord, help me to live in obedience to the convictions You bring to my heart and to allow the next person the same privilege? Help me to fulfill my mission by sharing my faith in Jesus. And by Your grace deliver me from accepting that devil-invented urge of possessing another's life—of seeking to control another's conscience."

Dear Lord; You have taught us to give counsel when adults ask, and even then You have taught us to answer with "meekness". "Forgive us wherein we have unconsciously tried to be conscience for others instead of remembering that You have said, "To his own master he standeth or falleth." Romans 14:4. I ask believingly, and claim triumphantly, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Reflection: If our married children seem somewhat distant when we go to visit them, would it be well to examine ourselves and ask ourselves whether we have been overly possessive of them?

PARENT TO MARRIED CHILDREN
When Satan e're possesses me.
You'll see I act possessively.

Seven Great Bible Facts:

1. Scripture advises us to "study to be quiet, and to do your own business" (I Thessalonians 4:11).
2. There is strength in quiet confidence. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength" (Isaiah 30:15).
3. We are admonished to be "kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us. (Ephesians 4:32).
4. Busybodies who mind the affairs of others are to be rebuked: "Wherefore rebuke them sharply" (Titus 1:13).
5. Children should honor their parents and older Christians and seek their counsel. Parents, however, are not to engage in nagging. "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." Exodus 20:12: "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD." Leviticus 19:32; "A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike." Proverbs 27:15.

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6. When we do find it our duty to "reprove, rebuke, exhort," it should be "with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2).

7. While most of our Lord's ministry was one of bringing comfort, forgiveness, healing, and life to those who asked; nevertheless, at exceptional times He uttered—His voice choked with tears—"Woe unto you" (Matthew 23).