



A bi-monthly periodical for young men

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EDITORIAL

I pray that this edition of Higher Ground finds you all in good health both physically and spiritually. Continue to fight the good fight of faith! *“Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand the wiles of the devil, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore...”* (Ephesians 6:13-14)

These are selections I’ve come across in my reading during the past few months, or have written as I study the Word of God myself. I would really appreciate having other people’s input – comments and articles – that I can include in the next issue. If something has been an encouragement or challenge to you, perhaps it will be to others as well.

EMPTY CONVERSATION

Christian conversation should not be mere jargon of empty, idle words. There are many people who talk incessantly and never say anything worth repeating or remembering. They never give any comfort to those who are in trouble. They never incite those who hear them to anything noble or good. Their words if gathered up would be millions of blossoms and not one handful of fruit; tons of sand and not one sparkle of gold. Surely such conversation is not worthy of immortal beings, children of God and heirs of glory, on their way home to glory.

From *In Green Pastures*
By J. R. Muller

SWIFT AND SLOW

James 1:19

‘Wherefore my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.’

‘Wherefore’ refers to verse 18, which says, ‘of his own will begat he us with the word of truth that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures’. As a direct result of being one of God’s firstfruits (and thus one of the ‘beloved brethren’) we should be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath.

We need to be swift to hear what others say, rather than swift to tell others where they are wrong. This does not mean that we are concerned about what others think about us, but rather, when they would suggest a deficiency in our life, we should correct it, when they ask us to do something, do it – we need to be swift to hear these things, or we may miss them!

Most importantly, though, we need to be swift to hear that still, small voice within, the voice of the Spirit of God that will guide us into all truth, and that keeps us in the will of God.

Slow to speak does not indicate lack of ability, but increased caution and restraint. Remember, the tongue is an unruly evil, and being slow to speak (stopping to think before speaking) is bound to help us eliminate many things that we would otherwise be said unnecessarily, or incorrectly. It may well save us a considerable amount of trouble!

Slow to wrath. How easy it is to become fed up with the things of this life, especially when they do not go according to plan. May we all learn the wondrous truth as the Psalmist, ‘great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them’

(Psalm 119:165)

By J. McPherson

ABIDE IN ME

John 15:4

‘Abide in me, and I in you.’

In the previous edition, the question was asked, “what does this mean, and how we can apply it to our lives”. I would like to address a few points I have gleaned from the passage myself, and from other writers that we may find helpful.

Bruce Wilkinson has written a helpful little book entitled *Secrets of the Vine*. In it, he brings out four levels of fruit bearing in the life of a Christian. While I do not endorse everything this man stands for, he makes the following useful points in this particular book.

1. No fruit (v2)

“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.” Notice that this is a barren branch; one that does not bear fruit. These branches are taken away. In the Greek the word is *airo*, which means to lift up. Think of a vine branch that is trailing on the ground, the leaves covered in mud. These leaves produce no fruit! Again, picture a Christian, dragging in the mud (sin) of the world, who bears no fruit, and Christ comes along, and picks him up out of the mire (chastise-ment) so he *can* bear fruit. (see also Hebrews 12:5-6)

2. Fruit (v2)

“Every branch that beareth fruit”. This branch does bear fruit. We are not told how much, but this is the place in which we all long to remain. We desire to bring forth fruit to the glory of God.

3. More fruit (v2)

“He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit”. This is the stage that follows immediately, and often so closely on the heels of ‘bearing fruit’ that many Christians become confused.

The second interesting thing is that purging involves cutting back, and the removal of certain objects in our lives – often it seems very similar to the chastisement for sin! It is important to notice, however, that the reasons for the two are very different. In the first place sin causes the unfruitfulness, in the second fruitfulness causes a time of unfruitfulness, but wait, *in preparation for more fruit.*

“For the Christian, rampant growth (that which must be pruned) represents all those preoccupations and priorities in our lives that, while not wrong, are keeping us from more significant ministry for God”.

4. Much fruit (v5)

“He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing”. I struggle to even begin to explain this stage. In his book, Bruce Wilkinson gives some of his personal testimony. Allow me to briefly recount this here. He had everything, including a prosperous, successful ministry, yet gradually he became less satisfied with this.

The result was a visit to a man who explained his situation in the following way...“when he first began to serve the Lord, his relationship with God was young and vibrant. It had to be, because his competence was weak. Gradually his competence increased to the stage where the fulfilment he experienced from his competence approximately equalled the fulfilment he experienced from his relationship with the Lord. Soon, his competence had become apparent to all, and he was very productive for the Lord, yet his walk with God began to suffer”: here he was –unsatisfied and unfulfilled.

What was the answer for him? What is the answer for us? Do we feel like we are doing so much for the Lord, even bearing fruit for Him, and yet not feeling like we are fulfilled? We need to learn to *ABIDE IN HIM*. This means fellowship with Him. Be like Jacob who said *“I will not let thee go until thou bless me”*; think upon Hebrews 11:6 – do you

diligently seek him – until you find him each day? May we learn to abide in Him daily, having a deep, meaningful relationship that will enable us to bear much fruit.

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” John 15:8

By J. McPherson
From *Secrets of the Vine*
Bruce Wilkinson

OUR DUTY TO GOD

Romans 12:1

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.’

I am certain that all of us have heard at least one message from this passage – so have I; in fact, I have heard many speak from this passage, and yet, as with all scripture, there are yet many precious gems to be discovered. Permit me to share just a few of them with you...

The passage begins with ‘I beseech you...’ Paul here is begging us to consider what he has to say here; he is in earnest, because he realizes the vital importance of what he is going to say.

Therefore... This word points to the previous verse ‘for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.’ It is because of what God has done in the earth, and specifically, what he has done for us that we consider this passage, and apply it to our own lives.

...By the mercies of God... Without the mercy of God, we would not be where we are today. We can do nothing good without Him (Jn 15:5). It is to him we owe everything, and for this reason we are begged to do the following...

Present your bodies a living sacrifice. In the Old Testament, a sacrifice was given either as an atonement for sin, or as an offering of thanksgiving. We are the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18), and thus, according to OT law, we would need to be redeemed (Num 18:15), since we

cannot be physically sacrificed (except through martyrdom). This is what Paul means by a *living* sacrifice – Redeeming our bodies by service to God, doing what is right.

...holy... OT offerings had to be of a clean animal, one of the right kinds as laid out by the Law. In the same way it is necessary for us to be sure we are righteous in the eyes of God before attempting any service for Him.

...acceptable... An offering was not acceptable if it contained blemishes or other imperfections, thus we cannot expect to please God by service for Him while we are living in some known aspect of sin.

...which is your reasonable service. What is our reasonable service? Presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice. Thus we see that it is our duty, as it were, to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice, by redeeming our bodies in service to our King.

By J. McPherson
Based on message by G. McPherson

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author of *Higher Ground* is Joshua McPherson. He is a young man who desires to walk closer to the Lord each day, and wishes to encourage other young men in the same pursuit.

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