

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Usurped Attitudes and Actions

*Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. (Jude 9–10, KJV 1900)*

We've all heard the occasional clichés that refer to people who think they are more knowledgeable or important than they are, such as "If he could buy himself for what he knows and sell himself for what he thinks he knows, he'd be a millionaire." In more gracious terms, Jude rebukes this self-inflated attitude. It is so incredibly easy for us to follow our prideful humanity instead of grace and think ourselves to be irrefutably right and anyone who disagrees with us to be wrong. Scripture rebukes this attitude frequently.

*And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. (1 Corinthians 8:2)*

Paul made this comment in the setting of a very practical problem in the Corinthian Church, meat offered to idols and later sold in the local meat market. Apparently, some folks in the church reached their own conclusion about the issue and wanted to force their view onto the church. Paul rebukes the attitude before giving the church the spiritual insight to deal with the problem in a more mature spiritual way. The greater problem was not whether eating meat sold in the market place that had formerly been offered to an idol in a pagan temple constituted idolatry or not. The greater problem was the impact that eating this meat might have on a weak brother or sister in the church.

*Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend. (1 Corinthians 8:13)*

Few passages are misquoted as frequently as this verse. Most often people quote the passage, "Wherefore, if meat offends my brother, I will eat no flesh..." The point is not whether the weak brother is offended or not. Paul's stated point is that a weak brother might observe Paul or other strong believers eating this meat with no regard whatever for the idol, but think that the action constituted worshipping the idol, leading them to engage in idol worship and believe that they were following Paul's example. The spiritually mature solution that Paul teaches has to do with the weak brother misinterpreting the behavior of stronger believers

and translating that misunderstood example into idolatrous conduct; **he offends** because of it.

As much as we'd like to find a clear Biblical example for every finite issue that ever surfaces in a local church, Scripture simply doesn't address many of the mundane issues that churches face in today's world. However, we err, grievously so, if we therefore think that Scripture gives us no direction in such matters. When we must deal with such issues, and we must until we "...needs go out of the world." (1 Corinthians 5:10b) Scripture actually gives us clear and convincing instructions. We should deal with any such issue in a way that will not "cause" a weak believer in the church to misread our conduct and fall into sinful error. Secondly, we should act so that the outcome of our action is viewed by those in and out of the church to respect our conduct as being "...decently and in order." (1 Corinthians 14:40; read the whole chapter and take note of Paul's requirement that the church so conduct her business that even those outside the church who observe her actions will conclude that "...God is in you of a truth." (1 Corinthians 14:25) Spiritual maturity in dealing with such issues wisely considers the impact our approach will have on a weak believer in the church or on a believer who has not yet joined the church. The wisest and most mature conduct will prompt every believer to regard the harmony of the body over personal opinions or goals (Philippians 2; the mind of Christ, who came and lived His life according to the Father's will, not His own), and to lead in the action by example, not by contention or top-down directions. (1 Peter 5:1-7; how does a mature believer, an elder who may be an ordained elder or a senior and respected person in the faith of the church, exercise that influence?)

In introducing Michael and Moses, Jude leads us to a powerful lesson that builds a foundation for spiritual grace and maturity in the faith. Pride and an inflated sense of one's personal knowledge or importance may prompt folks to overstep their position and Biblical authority. Whatever the details of the event, Satan had no claim to Moses' body. Based on the prideful attitude of the immature believer, Michael could have ripped into Satan in just about any way he chose, but he didn't. Rather

than railing and accusing Satan, Michael appealed to His God, "The Lord rebuke thee."

We seldom read or hear "railing" in our day. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines it—

Utter abusive language; complain persistently and abusively, rant. Freq. foll. by against, at.

For Michael to take upon himself to rebuke Satan would constitute "Railing." It would exceed his "Job description" authority. How wondrously our churches would be transformed if all of its members carefully avoided exceeding their authority over other believers and followed Michael's example and left off ungodly usurping of brothers and sisters. Indeed, Scripture does on occasion require that we confront and rebuke a brother or sister when they cross certain personal or Biblical boundaries, but Scripture also rebukes anyone claiming too much knowledge or authority over fellow-believers. (Leviticus 19:17; Matthew 18:15 and context) The posture of confronting taught in these and similar lessons is that of a brother, an equal in the faith, seeking to help, not of a pretended superior in the faith lording his ideas over another believer. When Michael and Satan confront each other with mirror opposite intentions for the body of Moses, despite Michael having directions from the Lord, he appealed to God's rebuke instead of presuming to take such action himself.

*But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.* Again, Jude uses a past experience to remind his readers that God's commandments and teachings are timeless and to be followed in all things, not just an occasional issue that suits our fancy. Jude applies the Michael-Satan confrontation to the present and to the specific people in his present circle of the faith who took too much authority upon themselves and abused that authority against other believers. It is so very easy to confront things in our lives that we know to be wrong. However, we all should fear the things that we do not even know, though we may think we know them. And it is our abusive and careless words about things that we think we know more than we actually know that Jude rebukes in this lesson. You see people thinking or doing certain things, and you don't readily understand why they do them. Rather than trying to learn from them, it is so very easy for us to judge their conduct wrongly and severely, to "...speak evil of those things" that we do not know.

Many of the minor details of things that churches must do to exist in this world that are not specifically explained pro or con in Scripture we classify as "Traditions." Tradition is a double-edged sword. Tradition can take on forms and objectives that very wisely respect and follow the two criteria mentioned above; the spiritual benefit of others, especially those weak in the faith, and spiritual decency and order. Or tradition can become foolish and self-

serving, defeating those wise spiritual goals. A brief study readily reveals similar dual-use of the word in the New Testament. The Jews created and imposed carnal traditions onto God's Law, given by Moses, and contradicted its stated purpose. However, Paul and other writers occasionally refer to traditions that they received and apparently passed on to the churches they taught with approval, though they often never give us the details of those traditions.

*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.* (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.* (2 Thessalonians 3:6)

Paul never itemizes these traditions, but he obviously commends them to the Thessalonians. Paul and the Thessalonians knew what they were, even though we do not.

What do we make of this lesson as we face the multitude of various issues that any local church faces on occasion? How do we decorate the church building? Do we remodel it or tear it down and start over? We meet each Sunday. What about meeting at other times during the week? How much should each member give to support the church? How should the deacons decide the use of those funds? The list is quite long, but these questions make the point. And the lesson, in balance, answers our questions. Rather than taking too many choices onto ourselves and lording our ideas over others in the church, we should first seek the Lord and His will in all such matters. Do we appeal to the Lord, as Michael did, or do we appeal to our personal wishes? And, as we decide such matters, the two governing principles that should guide our decisions, and the manner in which we implement those decisions is compelling, 1) a mature, wise example that does not lead weak believers to misunderstand what we do or why, and 2) what we do and how appears decent and orderly to all of our members and even to those who are not members of our churches.

If churches, particularly men and women who rise to positions of leadership and respect in a church, practiced these two principles in everything they did, we would not so puzzle over the Scriptures that refer to churches that are empowered to "...judge angels." (1 Corinthians 6:3)

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor