

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT, THEN, SHALL WE DO?

The circumstances in both the church and the world, and with regard to the relationships of the church within the world as I have analyzed them in the preceding chapters, will raise this question in the hearts of the sheep of his Little Flock. What can we do?

Shortly before the end of his earthly experience, Jesus approached his beloved Jerusalem from the descent of the Mount of Olives and paused to behold the panorama seen, much as today, across the Kidron Valley. Then, overcome by emotion, he burst into tears and was heard to say:

Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you when your enemies shall cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you because you did not know the time of your visitation (Luke 19:42-44).

Behold, how he loved them – that beautiful city of the deaf! Today, he loves the church no less, and weeps for it no less than for Jerusalem. The sheep of the Little Flock must not repeat the mistake of the early Christians, who permitted the unbelieving Jews to push them out of the synagogue, only to found a new but similar institution. It was inevitable that they be expelled from the synagogues, but the founding of the church was inexcusable. If the sheep follow the same pattern they will but persevere in establishing one more level of religious institutions in the world, while the church, like the historic synagogue, will continue in the darkness, without hope, because they have not listened to the Good Shepherd. Shall the sheep thus abandon the church to the darkness that envelops it, exactly as it shackles the synagogue? And what of the new level? Will it not also sink into twilight and error, as did the church?

No, the Lord requires a new and different battle plan. We can exist in the church much as a political party or a labor union in the nation – as a fellowship entity without capital, but dedicated to the task of calling both the church and the world to join the Little Flock of disciples, of those who have heard the Good Shepherd. I was for many years in the church. I found there many wonderful people, truly seeking to please their Lord, yet foundering because their shepherds have misled them. Therefore, I urge those sheep of the Little Flock that find themselves in some congregation to witness first to their friends in the next pew. When you are solitary, as I have been, one must not let the need for social acceptance by other members of the church dictate our witness. Set the words of Jesus before them, and pray for them. A few may respond and in any case you will have been faithful to our Lord. You will not be alone, for the Lord has promised to be with us to the end of the world!

We should not anticipate that the faith I have described herein will go unchallenged. The first challenger will most likely be the pastor! Jesus told his disciples that the days would come when they would be beaten and cast out of the synagogues, yet it is clear that he expected them nevertheless to prevail in laboring for the salvation of their sisters and brothers according to the flesh, the very ones who were to beat and expel them. So he would have us to labor within the churches, bearing testimony to the Truth, the love of the Father/hatred of life correlate, as we seek to spread the light of the Gospel of the Kingdom. We do this by calling our brothers and sisters in the churches to heed the pure Word of Jesus, and thus to join the Little Flock. The sole

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test of membership therein is the hearing of his voice.

There will be many times, perhaps every time, when this disrupts fellowship in the institution, a thing for which we should be prepared. But, if fellowship is to be ruptured, it should be done by those who refuse to hear the Good Shepherd, not by the sheep of the Little Flock. We can have true fellowship only with true fellow-sheep. To be put out of the church can be a heart-rending experience, just as it was for those early disciples who were put out of the synagogue. It will doubtless happen to many of us, but we must never evade the fray for fear of it. Better to be put out of the church than out of the Little Flock! I say this from personal experience! Do not fear to be called a troublemaker, for thus were Jesus and the early disciples maligned by the synagogue. Rejoice instead that you have been counted worthy to suffer abuse for the sake of the Name.

Think of the Little Flock as sheltered in a sheepfold atop a hill, such that a great leap is required to enter directly into it. And there is only one legitimate entry, the way guarded by the gatekeeper who is our Good Shepherd. This "great leap" was perfectly illustrated by the Prodigal Son in our Lord's parable, who with one resolution set his feet on the high path to his Father's house and redemption. Yet we must never cease holding to the glorious Word of Jesus our Lord; and when we are expelled from the church, as many have been and will be expelled, let it ever be because of our testimony to the Word.

Let me illustrate a probable cause of such expulsion, for I want everyone to be perfectly clear as to what I mean. A war has started, a patriotic war in which the country is in grave danger. The youth of your church are being drafted into the armed forces and trained to destroy the enemy. The pastor is strengthening the national resolve by delivering sermons designed to unite the church in the great patriotic cause. The church is blessing the young men and women as they go off to war, and praying for their victory and safe return. The Sunday School lessons inspire heroic fervor by telling how Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands in the service of God. This cannot go unanswered, for Jesus said:

Love your enemies (Luke 6:27), and

Do not resist one who is evil (Mat. 5:39).

So the battle must first be joined inside the church before ever it is joined in the field! This is but one of many such issues, and we must not let them pass! To do so is to surrender our fellow church members to the chains of everlasting darkness, which is the love of life.

Suppose then that the worst happens (or is it the best?) – as a result of your calling others to heed the pure Word of Jesus, you are excluded from the church, just as the early Christians were excluded from the synagogue. What then shall you do? Let Jesus answer this question:

Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets (Luke 6:22,23).

You see, then, how this is a blessed fate almost better than death, one that should inspire one to leap for joy, knowing that the result is great rewards in heaven!

The sheep of the Little Flock need fellowship together; they need to meet together, in homes and other private places, without capital and without authoritarian administration, to study the Word together under the tutelage of our Lord. Let them be servants, disciples and friends together in the bonds of love, and let them labor for the salvation of the church and for their neighbors in the world. This is the supreme expression of loving your neighbor as yourself – to suffer adversity in order to maintain the purity of the Word for the sake of those who are being saved. But having been excluded from one church, let them avoid at all costs the creation of another one. Let them

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not buy or build edifices; let them not create officers and administrations; let them not cease to pray, individually, for the salvation of those who have excluded them, for by doing so, the excluders have also excluded the Lord.

The children of light, the sheep of the Little Flock, are called to perform a service for the Lord that is fraught with all spiritual hazards. Anyone can immediately see that there will be powerful temptations confronting them in their struggle for the soul of the church. Perhaps foremost of these is the temptation to proud arrogance. When those who hear the voice of Jesus can see so clearly the way of the cross while suffering the opposition of the churchmen and churchwomen about them, it will be easy to fall into a trap of "better-than-thou-ism." If they succumb, they will be far more perfidious than those who only want to maintain the status quo, and will end up in a far deeper darkness. There needs to be prayer without ceasing for a spirit of genuine humility that considers others better than oneself, that never exalts oneself above the person in the next pew. We can judge no one else; we can hardly judge ourselves! Because we know ourselves better than anyone else knows us, and better than we can know anyone else, let us be content with the judgment of introspection. If we are honest, we will seldom fail to see our great failures and these will certainly humble us and dash any tendency to put on the "I know I have been saved, and you haven't." attitude. We have faith that we are being saved, but we do not and cannot know it; if we did know it, then we could have no faith, because that kind of faith, and that kind of knowledge, are mutually exclusive by definition.

I have only expressed my feelings here, and I do not want anyone to look to me for the Lord's will in any case. After a lifetime in the hard way, I can counsel and comfort, but only Jesus can tell us what to do. None of us can find this except through the words of Jesus! Every individual in every case, no matter the circumstances, must seek their light in him who is the light of the world, through abiding in the words of Jesus of Nazareth. In some cases he may want you, out of love for your neighbor, to remain in or to join a congregation that goes by the name of church. If you are already there when his word takes possession of you, he may want you to remain for so long as the church will accept you. Or, in another case, circumstances may be such as to leave only one course of action: get out of that congregation as soon as you possibly can! If you are outside the church and not a member of any congregation when he possessed you, he may want you to join one and there seek to manifest his living Word. In other circumstances, he may want you to remain separate from any congregation and seek fellowship in small groups outside any church. Only one thing is certain: he always wants each one of us to continue in the Living Word of Jesus of Nazareth, which is our salvation.

Now in all honesty, I myself cannot imagine any set of circumstances that would result in his wanting any one of his sheep to join in with a crowd of goats who are following the strange shepherd. When I recall those long ago years when I struggled to maintain a bond with the church, I often think how much grief I might have avoided had I just come out from among them as soon as I recognized the problem. Nevertheless I did witness and the thought that perhaps even one of God's children may have found their hope in the hard way as a result of that witness greatly consoles me. I cannot say that he would have had me do any other thing. Today, I witness from outside. Jesus led me out, and I cannot imagine his ever leading me back in. But he is with me. His rod and his staff, they comfort me.