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Speaking Evil of Rulers

- by Greg Gwin

When the apostle Paul had been wrongly arrested and was being unjustly persecuted by the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem, he unknowingly directed some harsh words towards the high priest. When those who were standing nearby informed Paul that the man was, indeed, the high priest, he quickly recanted by saying: *"I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people"* (Acts 23:5). Although the man was thoroughly corrupt and dishonest, Paul still understood that the 'office' deserved respect and honor.

The principle illustrated by Paul's example needs to be imitated by all men. Application can certainly be made to those who hold office in civil government. While we may disagree with the political views of those in power, it is still our duty to *"honor the king"* (1 Peter 2:17).

But the concept of *"not speaking evil of the ruler of thy people"* has particular relevance to the church and those who oversee local congregations. We are commanded to *"obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls"* (Hebrews 13:17).

Unfortunately, Christians are often too quick to complain about and find fault with the elders. It seems that every judgment they make and every decision they offer is scrutinized and inspected with a harsh, critical eye. They are sometimes the subject of gossip, slander, and wrongful accusations. Many have not learned to *"esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake"* (1 Thessalonians 5:13).

Can elders make mistakes? Of course! Can they even make sinful errors? No doubt. But even when this happens, we are told to be very careful in how we deal with them. *"Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear"* (1 Timothy 5:19-20). The conduct of some Christians shows that they have not taken these clear instructions to heart.

Paul understood the importance of respecting the office of those in leadership positions. We should do the same. Think!



A Reuben Marriage

- by Steve Fontenot

And Leah conceived and bore a son and named him Reuben, for she said, "because the Lord has seen my affliction; surely now my husband will love me." Then she conceived again and born a son and said, "because the Lord has heard that I am unloved." So she named him Simeon. And she conceived again and bore a son and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me." Therefore he was named Levi." (Gen.29:32-34).

"Surely now my husband will love me" cannot refer to sex - she had that. "I am unloved"? Did not Jacob provide her housing, food, and clothing? Is that not "love"? It is, and it is important. But something was still lacking. There is another kind of love - a love she needed and wanted. "Become attached"? But wasn't she married to Jacob? What does she mean? She felt Jacob was "detached." Not legally - they were married. Not physically - they had children. There is obviously another kind of "love" - a love of emotional attachment.

"Reuben," "Simeon," and "Levi" - names that stand as testimonials to what Leah (and many women today) wanted so badly but did not have. Remember men, the Lord "sees"(Reuben) and "hears" (Simeon) the "affliction" of a woman that longs for such "attachment" (Levi). 

What is the Purpose of Baptism?

David A. Cox

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

There are two common views about the purpose of baptism. One view is that baptism has absolutely nothing to do with salvation but is a public proclamation of one’s faith. This view is often stated as “an outward sign of an inward grace.” The second view is that baptism is essential for obedience and is directly connected to man’s salvation. It is quite evident that these two views stand in direct conflict with each other. What does the Bible teach concerning the purpose of baptism?

Jesus taught that baptism and salvation were connected. In Mark 16:15- 16, He told His disciples to go “and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:15- 16). Just days later, Peter told those at Jerusalem to “Repent, and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Peter clearly states here that baptism was to remit or bring about the forgiveness of their sins. Peter made a connection between baptism and salvation when he spoke of Noah. Noah did all that God commanded him to do (Genesis 6:22) and built an “ark for the saving of his household” (Hebrews 11:7). Peter speaks of Noah’s example foreshadowing baptism, which now saves us (1 Peter 3:21). As Peter describes the deliverance of Noah and his family from the flood, the likeness of baptism that now saves us. This is done at baptism because:

1. Our sins are “washed away” or remitted (Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38).
2. The old man of sin is put to death, and we arise as a new man in Christ (Romans 6:4-6).
3. One enters a new relationship in Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).
4. In this new relationship, one is taken from the kingdom of darkness, translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Colossians 1:13).

In baptism, the Bible teaches that one should not be concerned about the “outward sign” but “the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Peter 3:21b). Baptism is when one is added to the body of Christ, brought into a relationship with God, and saved from our sins.

Let us remember that when it comes to baptism that we need to make sure that we do not align ourselves with what man says but with what God has said. Man needs salvation from sin, and God has done all He can do for us. May we all completely place our trust in God and submit entirely to his will.