

## Exhort With All Longsuffering

*"Therefore watch, and remember; that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears"—Acts 20:31*

BEING "partakers of the heavenly calling" and being made "partakers of Christ," we need exhortation, edification and admonition that we might "hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm to the end."

Such conversation and speaking one to another as sons and daughters of God are quite needful during the testing and perfecting of our faith in God.

Without faith it is impossible to please Him, and the faith that does please Him must be proven under trial. Before us all without exception is a course of probation which has been described as, "the cross before the crown, humility before honor, probation before exaltation"—the only difference in our several courses being in their length, some being longer than others—but the same divine principle applies to all.

In the Deity's infinite mind He has chosen this principle by which His creative work is to be done to the glory and honor of His Name, His character of holiness, righteousness, wisdom and power.

But what makes the principle of probation necessary is the fact that, though we put on Christ in baptism and are aware that we must arise to newness of life, yet when we would do good, evil is present with us. We are still in the flesh, but must not mind the things of the flesh. We are still in the world (the total manifestation of fleshly things), but must not be of the world.

To exhort, edify and admonish one another is beautifully necessary in this state, as reflecting the power of salvation that is in the word of God. Our heavenly Father expects us to be thus concerned with one another of like precious faith, especially on the first day of the week when we meet to remember our absent Lord in the appointed way.

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NOW there are a number of reasons why we need to exhort, edify and admonish one another while we continue in our present state and the Lord remains away. First, it is a fact known among us that "man doth not live by bread alone," that is, merely by eating literal food.

**We must daily partake of spiritual food that the spiritual man in Christ may be sustained and grow.**

Such food is to be derived from that which gave birth to the New Man, even the Word of God. Just as we seat ourselves around a table to eat literal food to satisfy the needs of the natural man, so also must we meet around the Word of God for the food of the spiritual man.

Of course we may do so alone, individually, by reading, study and meditation. **But it behoves the family of God to do so collectively or ecclesially.** This is right and fitting, giving occasion for mutual expressions of joy and gladness of being in the Truth.

We are often compared to leaky vessels in that we are not able to retain thoughts and ideas put into the mind, a fact that is dreadfully true in spiritual things; therefore we are in need of daily reminding in these things, just as we need daily natural food. Peter gave expression to this (2 Pet. 3:1)—

"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance."

And what is brought to mind in so doing? The next verse answers,

"That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord."

The word of exhortation should serve the same purpose—directing our minds and affections to what is written in the Holy Scriptures.

We know that the flesh is weak, and that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. This is a truth that we are taught by personal experience. As it is written—

"The natural man receiveth not the things of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

It is because of this weakness, deception and foolishness of the flesh (which is ever present with us), that our spiritual man will desire and seek to be exhorted, edified and admonished.

It is a truth that we should all recognize, that from time to time we seem to need a reassurance and reaffirmation of our faith—that the things that are surely believed among us are not cunningly devised fables.

For example, as we continue to heed the command "labor not to be rich," we may at times be inclined to regret that we are doing so; but we take heart and are strengthened to continue steadfast when we hear of others in the faith speaking the same thing and agonizing in the same narrow path which leads to life.

It is the same with the Truth in all its particulars.

**Our faith is built up and encouraged as we hear that our brethren are of the same mind and speak the same things and are striving to conduct their lives in harmony with the holy commandments we have received.**

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THE course of our probation before exaltation is set before us. Its purpose is to prove our faith in God, through Christ, that the faith may be subjected to the testing of fiery trials, removing all impurities and dross that by refining it may be pure.

Let us encourage, build up, and warn one another, because we are all leaky vessels and because we require reminding, since the flesh is weak. But weakness is no excuse for laxness. On the contrary it shows the need for **exhortation**, which means: "to encourage, incite, urge"; and for **edification**, which means: "to build-up, construct; hence to organize, to establish," and for **admonition**, which means: "to warn or reprove gently or kindly, but seriously; to remind, to testify, say again and again."

Let us briefly consider these three separately in line with the short definitions given.

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FIRST, we have exhortation: If this means "to encourage, incite, urge," we may ask, "From what are we being drawn? and to what are we being encouraged?"

The answer may quickly come to mind, "We are being drawn away from fleshly things and encouraged toward spiritual things." Various portions of the Scriptures teach that the word of exhortation has this two-fold purpose, a typical example of which is found in Heb. 3:12-14—

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

"But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

"For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end."

Indeed, this is the true purpose of exhortation—to help keep us from the evil heart that causes departure from the living God, and to encourage the good and honest heart to hold the beginning of its confidence steadfast unto the end.

In these verses we are admonished to exhort one another away from the Old Man of the flesh and his deeds towards the New Man of the spirit with his fruit.

Once the Seed-Word has been sown in our hearts, we must commence to destroy all weeds and thorns that may choke its growth toward fruitfulness. In Galatians, Paul enumerates the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit, and declares that the works of the flesh will **keep us out of the Kingdom**, while those who bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, are living and walking in the Spirit, and so belong to Christ.

Paul is exhorting the Galatians in the two-fold sense spoken of—to subdue the works of the flesh and cultivate the fruits of the Spirit. We can no longer cater to the flesh, but must bring forth fruit meet for repentance.

Some say, "It's all right to exhort us, but don't tell us how to live."

**This is a contradiction:** for the exhortation must deal intimately with the believer's way of life—his daily life—his living day by day. Jesus said—

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

What is it to take up the cross but to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts in offering our bodies a living sacrifice holy, acceptable to God?

This is to be done daily, that is, day by day, every day. These words of Jesus and all his precepts and commandments which we have received through him and his apostles, apply to our personal daily conduct of each and every day.

The word of exhortation, then, applies directly or indirectly to our private lives, whether we are speaking of the Kingdom of God or the Promises made unto the Fathers, or of the Law of Moses, or any other Bible subject; **any and all may serve as encouragement to hold fast our confidence without wavering.**

We may even get words of exhortation from a public lecture on the Truth; for whether it be preaching the Truth or an exhortation, we should find ourselves urged on in the Faith with love and good works.

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THE qualities of character in the new man are spoken of in (Hebrews 10:23:25):

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful that promised); and let us consider one another to provoke to love and good works;

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Here are true words of exhortation, striking not merely at things as they appear on the surface, but **going to the root of things:** the desires, causes, and motives of our every thought, word and deed:—

"Let us consider one another to PROVOKE unto love and to good works."

Is there room for improvement in our daily lives in the direction of love and good works? Certainly. Are we doing things we ought not to do? Let us strive to stop doing them. Are we leaving undone things we ought to do? Let us be up and doing. If we are unprofitable servants when we have done that which is our duty to do, then what are we when we are not doing enough, or when we are not doing anything?

Let us exhort one another daily in these things. Let us be more heart-searching. Let us provoke one another to love and good works.

By so doing we will help each other to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering. Our Father will be well pleased with us being so engaged with exhortation from His Word freely exchanged among us.

*"If any man obey not, note that man and have no company with him. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother"—2 Thess. 3:14*

EDIFICATION is next to be considered, which, needless to say, is closely related to exhortation. To "edify" means specifically, "to build or construct; hence to organize or establish."

**What is there to "build and construct"?** The moral or spiritual character; that is, the Godly or Christ-like character, which is the holy and righteous character.

Here, too, as with exhortation, there is a two-fold work to be done: the tearing down of the old man of the flesh and the building up of the new man of the Spirit.

The carnal edifice of fleshly things which characterized our former walk in life must be torn down, overcome and crucified. This work of tearing down the old edifice and throwing out the wreckage continues to the end of our probation. The building up of the spiritual edifice is the work of a life-time. Hence, both processes—tearing down and building up—are co-extensive to the end.

Now the end of our probation is death or, if we are "alive and remain," it is the coming of the Lord

**All during our probation we should be making progress week by week, month by month, year by year in this two-fold work of tearing down and breaking away from fleshly things, and building up, however slowly, the edifice of the Spirit.**

The tearing down of carnal things should not always be predominant. Though we must ever be on our guard against the flesh, we should be reaching a time, sooner or later, when the spiritual edifice will be clearly discernable in its divine attributes.

If we put and keep our trust in God, there is no thing or person that can stop the work of construction that will redound to the glory and honor of our God; for it is His will that this work be brought to a successful completion.

We have left the "house of bondage" and are striving to be a spiritual House, the Temple of the living God; which means we are organizing and establishing our dispositions and characters according to the divine example manifested in Christ Jesus. As it is written, we are of the—

"Household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone;

"In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy Temple in the Lord:

"In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit"

(Eph 2:19-22).

The type of this temple was built by Solomon, who was instructed by God that **no work was to be done on it at the time and place of its assembly** (1 Kings 6.7)—

"And the house, when it was in building, was built of Stone MADE READY BEFORE it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building."

The stones, then (and we are the anti-type, living stones) according to the place they were to serve, were prepared FIRST, and **afterwards** taken to the site of the temple (Zion or Moriah) and reared.

Now is the time we, as living stones, must be cut to exact dimensions and have all roughage ground away and all sides polished. Now is the time of preparation, that, in the near future, we may be assembled to be "fitly framed together," which, in general, is the building up and establishing process.

The individual application of these things to ourselves should be obvious. The preparatory, pre-assembly work to be done on each of us is to have all fleshly dross and roughage cut away from our desires, affections, emotions and dispositions.

This could not be easy since there is so much going on at the same time in the way of wrecking the old, clearing of the site, and building the new.

But we must endure this time of organization and establishing ourselves, grounded in the Faith and built upon that rock that is immovable. Progress may be slow, but let it be sure by both beginning and finishing the work (together with God) according to the instructions, commandments and precepts that have been delivered to us. Let us be—

"Built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

*This we should do as individuals, as separate ecclesias, and as the Ecclesia of the Living God.*

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THIRD under review is **admonition**. Like edification, this is closely related to exhortation, though having some sensitive and painful duties associated with it. Specifically, admonition means: "To warn or notify of fault; to reprove gently or kindly, but seriously."

This definition is well known. However, admonition also means. "To put in mind; to testify, to say again and again." To be admonished means to be **repeatedly** reminded, and, as with exhortation and edification, there is the same two-fold application in connection with it: we must be reminded of that which is detrimental to our spiritual welfare and also of that which is conducive to our well-being.

The "severest" kind of admonition in the sense of warning and reproof is that contained in Titus 3:10—

"A man that is an heretic after the first and second **admonition**, reject."

An heretic or factious person is one who **holds a teaching contrary to the Truth**, causing a schism in the body. Our relation to him, as various renditions of the above verse put it, is to "have no more to do with him", "have nothing more to do with him," "reject," "avoid," "refuse."

But he is not to be treated thus until after the first and second admonition.

In all such serious matters, whether of the ecclesia to a member or the member to the ecclesia, the Christian way of appeal and reconciliation (in the sense of gaining or winning) must first be lovingly obeyed.

Rejection of a brother by the ecclesia, or the brother of the ecclesia, should not be done till all other steps have failed, not even temporarily. But having failed, rejection must follow.

Bro. Roberts treats of this in the "Ecclesial Guide," Sec. 32, entitled: "Cases of Sin and Withdrawal." He says there—

"Withdrawal is a serious step, and ought not to be lightly taken against any brother. It erects a barrier and inflicts a stain not easily removed.

"It ought never to be taken until all the resources of the scriptural rule have been exhausted.

"The rule laid down by Christ for the treatment of personal sin in general . . . Only when this has failed are we at liberty to withdraw."

To give a clearer understanding of just what "withdrawal" is, we can do no better than to further quote from the concluding paragraph of this Sec. 32—

"Withdrawal, too, when it comes (it must be noted), is not expulsion. It is the apostolic form of separation, which, though practically equivalent to expulsion in its effects on the separated, is more in harmony with the spirit enjoined by Christ upon his house, than the form in vogue among professing bodies of all sorts.

**"Withdrawal means that those withdrawing do modestly and sorrowfully step aside from the offender for fear of implication in his offence.** Expulsion means kicking out, which is a different thing, and implies and generates the arrogant attitude of ecclesiastical excommunication

"The careful preservation of right forms in these things is a help to the preservation of the right spirit."

We are further reminded of this "right spirit" in 2 Thess.—

"If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

"Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thess. 3: 4-15).

This bears repeating—

**"Count him not as an enemy—ADMONISH him as a brother."**

This means that it is possible to do a right thing in the wrong way or in the wrong spirit. If the action to be taken is right, it is only so if done in the scriptural way with the right spirit. We must always adhere to the Scriptures and to the spirit and mind of Christ.

This may seem easy when the duties or obligations are pleasant, but when severe admonition must be given the task is difficult and uncomfortable. Such unpleasant circumstances may be met by—

1. Being certain of, and faithful to, one's belief;
- 2 Following the scriptural procedure;
3. Being meek and reverent in the discharge of your duty.

But let the reasons for giving admonitory warning sink down deep into your hearts and minds. It is not done for our glory, or to vindicate self, or to show one "holier" than another, nor merely to get the offender to admit being wrong. No. Its aim is not to give fleshly satisfaction but **to preserve the Truth and to win back the brother.** And this we will do as God wills it.

As spiritual Israel, there are "historic admonitions" we must heed, such as what natural Israel manifested, and concerning which we read (1 Cor. 10:11):

"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples and they are written for our **admonition.**"

This is the most serious admonition that spiritual Israel as a body can receive with opened hearts, being warned and reminded of what we should not be and of what we should be, as pointed out in "The Visitor" for Feb., 1955—

"ALL our fathers were under the cloud, and ALL passed through the sea and were ALL baptized . . . and did ALL eat . . . and did ALL drink."  
—but **still** God finally rejected them and scattered their carcasses in the wilderness.

Certainly we must receive admonitory reminding in these things. We cannot overlook the fact that the Master himself has said—

"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

When we apply such words to ourselves, **personally and individually**, we get some idea of what it is to RECEIVE admonitory warning, reproof and reminding. Both the giving and the receiving of any kind of admonition must be in the right spirit.

Reproof and warning must not be received as a martyr to self, or with brooding and repressed murmuring and seething inside (which must sooner or later burst forth). Such does not characterize the quiet spirit and humility with reverence.

So, whether the admonition is for the Body as a whole or to individual members, we NEED admonition, warning, testimony and saying over and over again that which we should be, with a view to the thought—

"What manner of people ought we to be?"

Let us not stop speaking to one another about the truth of that straight and narrow way that is before us during this our probation, thinking such words and phrases to be trite or old-fashioned.

And let us not speak less of the promises of God made unto the fathers, or "tone down" our testimony against the world and modern religion to suit the "modern times."

The Truth, the Faith, must be repeated time and time again among us and in our preaching of it, as its basic principles are so beautifully taught in sundry portions of Scripture

We must, then, all endeavour to both give and receive admonition and warning and reproof and reminding in those things which intimately concern our daily walk in Christ during this, our probationary career.

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AND finally, may we ever keep in mind that God is not subjecting us to a probation of trial and testing that we might be rejected and condemned! But, rather, as it were, to teach us the two-fold truth of, on the one hand, the sinfulness of the flesh-nature and that man is worthy of death, and, on the other hand, that we might learn of Him concerning His Name and so in the end receive His gift of life eternal which is in Christ Jesus.

*So let us exhort, edify and admonish one another of like precious faith, not only formally "from the platform," but in our conversation also, that we might have the characteristics of all God's children, even of those that "fear the Lord and speak often one to another."* N.M. 7-8/62 Berean

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