

WHO SHALL STAND

Br. Jerry Leslie

Mal. 3:2, 3, "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap; and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness."

Though the Lord's people have been tried and proved throughout the Gospel Age, there comes a special proving at the end of the age. It is "when he appeareth" in our text in Malachi. We read in Joel 2:11, "And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army; for his camp is very great; for he is strong that executeth his word; for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" The same time is described in Zeph. 1:14-18 and is said to be the "Day of the trumpet."

It is the same day that the Revelator speaks of in Rev. 6:17 at the introduction to the seventh seal, from 1874 onward, and therefore the day in which we are living. "For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

Our opening text in Malachi speaks of purifying the sons of Levi. We believe this is a picture of the Household of Faith; both the Church and the Great Company. We learn from Num. 4:48 there were 8,580 Levites; yet there were only five appointed for the typical sacrificing. Exod. 28:1 "Take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons." Indeed the Royal Priesthood is a "Little Flock". Even in the type, two of the five were unfaithful. These may picture a second death class, leaving only one priest for every 2,800 Levites.

If the Great Company be pictured in the hosts about the throne in Rev. 5:11, then their numbers could well be in the millions. Then to Psalm 91:7 may not be a far fetched picture of the proportion of those running for the prize but failing to receive it. "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee." At any rate Bro. Russell's suggestion in Tabernacle Shadows, page 119 of the ratio of attempts to victories serves well to remind us what an urgent race we run. We know that all that can be shaken, will be shaken--and is.

If the words--"Who shall stand when he inspects?" bring an anxious throb to our hearts, we know that although the fire will separate the dross from the gold, nevertheless the refiner is our Master who bought us with his own blood and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, "but will direct the issue that ye may be able to bear it." 1

Cor. 10:13, Diag.

These trials will come to us from unexpected quarters, and necessarily so. If we knew each trial ahead of time, we would be less tested and proved. The Lord wishes to prove and improve the real and spontaneous sentiments of our hearts, and that by purging them.

So the question for us is still—"Who shall stand?" From this standpoint we can at least know which general areas the tests will come. We see the Church specially tested along three lines in this day of the Lord. 1) Loyalties, 2) Discipline, 3) Truth. Surely they are not the only tests that come to us but they are vital ones.

LOYALTY: Unqualified obedience is God's first law, justice and judgment being the foundation of His authority. Knowing that the loyalty of each will be limited by certain human limits and uncertain human judgments, we must realize loyalty depicts not just conformity to laws, but an active, personal, dedication to those principles.

Clearly defined loyalties will help us establish priorities. It was so with the three Hebrews in their decision before the fiery furnace--Dan. 3:17, 18. It was so for Daniel himself concerning his worship of God--Dan. 6:7-10. Peter's loyalty helped him distinguish between the will of men and the will of God; and so he said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" when commanded not to preach. (Acts 5:29) Our Lord's own admonition is "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God."

We might ask ourselves the question: In what way does my loyalty to God and His cause of truth cost me?

Standing by a purpose true,
Heeding God's command,
Honor to the faithful few!
All hail to Daniel's Band!
Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone!
Dare to have a purpose firm
Dare to make it known!

This loyalty is always built on a personal relation to the Lord. All other relations are secondary, subservient to this. If we did this, our relation and responsibilities to family, classes, service organizations, brethren, will all find their proper perspective. Let our respect for organizations, prominent brethren, and activities be first built upon our loyalty

to God. It is not something we can borrow from those on whom we would like to lean, as if our loyalty belonged anywhere but with God. Personalities have always been a test of loyalties amongst the brethren since Pentecost. "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos." Let us not be surprised if some of the greatest decisions we make for conscience toward God are amongst ourselves. Our Loyalties will be proved brethren.

DISCIPLINE: In common language this means making our bodies, our flesh do what our new minds tell it to do. We refer here to the restrictions we voluntarily place on ourselves. We think of the unique liberty belonging to the New Creation. Where then comes restrictions and limits?

The common meaning of liberty is freedom, power to will and do free from hindrances. In its superlative degree this is God's alone. Yet consider, what makes God's power so meaningful? Is it not the restrictions and limits He expresses himself within? He will not deny Himself. He enters into and keeps covenants and promises. The glory of the universe is made known through its laws and rules uniform for millenniums without failure. The power of Jesus' life is manifested in its restrictions. Consider the limits of his work being confined to the little land of Israel, and but twelve Apostles which preserved it for nearly 2,000 years. Even the discipline of the legitimate human indulgences made his life an enduring example.

Discipline in its aspect of self-denial is important to our spiritual survival in this end of the age. It is vital in answering the question, Who shall stand: when gratification of affections becomes burdensome (Matt. 5:29); when honors and praise of men must be forgone, lest they become a snare (Heb. 11:24-26); when friends and relatives must be renounced so far as they oppose or influence us to oppose the truth (Mark 10:29, 30); or when we must relinquish our own righteousness, choices, and rationalizations so as not to depend on them. Phil. 3:9, 10.

In an age of such comforts and ease of living it is not easy to make practical application of these things. What has it cost us and will it cost us of discipline to turn down demands from our employment in time and position? Or to exchange a visit to a sunny beach for visiting our shut-in brethren? What does it cost of discipline to choose an evening with the brethren in our home for study and fellowship, over the same time doing the things we call necessity to maintain a standard of convenience, which even kings of past ages never knew? What discipline will it cost us to expose our convictions, not granting the flesh its familiar rationalizations?

True discipline is a setting of the will and actions with no alternatives, no excuses. Paul

said, "this one thing I do." He also tells us in 1 Cor. 9:27 that he severely disciplined his body, for lest having preached to others he should become a cast away. We sometimes excuse or justify ourselves before the eyes of each others. We may say with Moses, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt" as an expression of our incompetence. (Exod. 3:11) At other times we may feel the difficulties of our undertakings as we read in Prov. 22:13, "There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." Do we from fear of misuse of our talents sometimes not use them at all? (Matt. 25:24) Do we consider the pressure of life and business too great--Luke 14:16-20, "I have bought a piece of ground and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. . . I have brought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. . I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." Consider the sad condition of Duet 20:8, "What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart." Why not bear these excuses before the Lord, and ask ourselves if He will accept them? Mal. 1:13, "Ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord." Therefore let us offer our best efforts when it costs us the most of inconvenience and strength and "Make straight paths for our feet lest that which is lame be turned out of the way."

Now let us consider the TEST OF TRUTH in this Day of the Lord on those who stand. We sing "Truth how sacred is the treasure, teach us Lord its worth to know." Is it always a treasure to us? Truth has always been a vital test; it is so today. Our Lord gives us an illustration in Luke 6:47-49, "Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great." Notice this is addressed to those who hear, not unbelievers. Only those building with true faith principles and obedience and deeds can survive the tests of the storm.

Paul uses a similar illustration in 1 Cor. 3:10-15. Here we learn that all who build on Christ will be saved, but some build with inferior material, and they are saved so as by fire. The gold, silver and precious stones may be considered as sound doctrines, or the character traits which can only have their basis in true doctrine. 2 Pet. 1:8, 9, "If these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." It is not in

harmony with these texts to say, "I will have love, mercy, patience, etc., but I cannot afford to be too conclusive on things of God's word and plan."

Psalm 3:14, 15, "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom and the man that getteth understanding: for the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than find gold." And again Psa. 23:23, "Buy the truth, and sell it not." What is it to buy the truth? It is to love it, reverence it. What is it to sell the truth? It is to minimize God's word or render it only token gestures. All this does not mean we will have perfect knowledge now, nor that we should allow heads to become swelled. It does tell us much about our conduct in holding and living the truth.

Turn with me now to 2 Cor. 2:15-17, "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." Knowledge of and dedication to God's word has an influence on others and is here set forth under the figure of an odor diffused in every place. Truth will prove the heart condition. It may be regarded from two standpoints, depending on the hearer: 1) either it will be as a poisonous, death dealing influence or 2) a refreshing life sustaining fragrance. This difference is caused by nothing in the Gospel itself, but in the spirit of those that hear it. The light enlightens, warms, quickens and makes fruitful some, while it blinds and destroys others. Thus the light is noxious to diseased eyes, yet the sun is not responsible for the injury. It is said that vultures avoid the fragrance of myrrh, and yet myrrh is no less myrrh for being shunned by vultures.

These are the different effects of preaching the truth. This can be so however only when the truth is presented properly, in its purity and entirety. A message may be the truth and rejected, not because of the hearers worldliness, but because it is wrongly delivered. No one can produce such an influence on his hearers as Paul suggests, and be acceptable to God, whatever else the result of his preaching, unless he proclaims the Gospel in the right manner and spirit. It must come from a heart honestly dedicated to the glory of God, regardless of personal and temporal advantage. We should hold forth God's word mingled with no human speculations or adulterations.

With this idea Paul introduces in a sudden and striking manner: "AND WHO IS SUFFICIENT FOR THESE THINGS?" God will recognize as his own only that which flows from a pure heart, filled with Christ. The answer to his question comes in Verse 17. The figure is that of the wine merchant that adulterated and diluted his merchandise; signifying to deal dishonestly, deceitfully with God's word. Paul set up a very high

standard for the purity of doctrine. This ministry which all the consecrated have received is one of tremendous import. The truth is God's truth, and there is great responsibility on those that preach and those that hear.

To under-rate His word, its exceeding great and precious promises, or to mystify the conditions on which they may be realized, or to make void its solemn warnings, or to lay aside the explanations of His servant is indeed dangerous business, in which the faithful saints, those who stand will not engage.

As we began, so we close--Who may abide the day of His coming, who shall stand when He inspects? 'He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto The Lord an offering in righteousness.' That is the reason for our purging.

AND WHO IS SUFFICIENT UNTO THESE THINGS? You are, if you are willing to not only render mental assent, but to invest your whole life in offering this righteous offering unto the Lord. Prov. 6:20-23, "My son, keep thy father a commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life."

Let us not be weary – we shall reap if we faint not.