

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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A Witness of Integrity

Dear Friends,

Although John the Baptist (the baptizer) stands in a unique—altogether one-of-a-kind—position as the bridge between Old Testament prophets and New Testament ministry, between prophet and preacher—he also serves as a noble example for every man who attempts to fill the gospel ministry. He remained consistently faithful to his charge, loyal to his Lord, and true to his message. He never allowed his ministry to deteriorate into an “all about me” mindset. Sadly when a man redirects his ministry focus from the Lord Jesus Christ to himself (“my ministry,” “my...”), his actions state louder than his words of protest that he considers himself to be more important than the message about his Lord—and about his Lord for that matter. In vivid and delightful contrast John’s ministry from beginning to end lived and preached “He must increase, but I must decrease.” Our sinful human ego seeks ways to increase self, to promote self into prominence. However, John kept his ego in control by a faithful focus on his Lord. The credibility of a man’s message in the pulpit is either reinforced or compromised by the message of his feet. A man may preach a mediocre message from the pulpit, but if the congregation sees him preaching a powerful message of truth with his feet, they’ll respect and honor the pulpit message. In contrast if they hear a powerful message from the pulpit, but see a compromised, self-centered message from his feet, they will lose respect for him and for his message, however eloquently preached. May we all seek to be credible witnesses, first with our feet, and then with our words, Joe Holder

A Witness of Integrity

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. ([Joh 1:6-9](#))

The weight that we give to a witness depends on the witness's integrity. A man may give an incredible testimony, but if he has a reputation for exaggeration or for a lack of truthfulness in any other way, we are likely to ignore his testimony. His character destroys his testimony. Was John a reliable witness to Jesus? First, what did Jesus say about him? *"He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light."* ([Joh 5:35](#)) The word that Jesus used to refer to John, "light," refers to a lamp or a candle. By its nature a lamp burns as long as it has oil and a wick, or a candle burns till the wax has been depleted by the fire. A lamp or a candle is temporary in its design. When John (the apostle) refers to Jesus in [Joh 1:8-9](#) as the true "Light," he used a different word, a word that refers to the light energy itself. A lamp produces derived light. Jesus is the underived light energy of God. He is the source of light itself. John affirms this point by referring to Jesus as the "true Light, which lighteth ever man that cometh into the world." Jesus' reference to John as a "burning and a shining light" speaks of John's faithfulness to his charge. How often in our fallen world we observe people talking about other people in ways that are less than respectful. If the subject of the unkind words were to hear those unkind comments, he/she would want to correct the gossip's false characterizations. In this case Jesus affirms the truthfulness of John's testimony. *"We preach not ourselves..."* ([2 Corinthians 4:5](#)) is the mark of every faithful minister of the gospel. An unfaithful witness (or an unfaithful minister) will often forget the primary objective of his role. Rather than maintaining a tight focus on his testimony, he will shift the focus to himself and not his testimony. The man's role on the witness stand is not about himself; it is about his testimony. Sadly, "It is all about me"

characterizes the ministry of a few men in the Christian community. We've seen some of them on Christian broadcasting. Others are not so visible, but their damage to the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ is no less than the more public figures. Many years ago our church sponsored a special weekend meeting in which a number of ministers spoke to our church. It was a warm, spiritual meeting. Following our practice, I asked the men whom we had invited to do most of the preaching. Several local ministers also attended the meeting. I tried to use each of them in one role or another. A few days later I received a letter from one of the ministers, fiercely complaining to me because I had not used him in a more prominent role during the meeting. Such a self-promoting attitude severely damages the reputation of a man whose primary divine assignment is to serve, not expect others to serve him. After thinking about the situation for a while, I responded to the man with a simple letter that effectively asked the man a question. "We had a very spiritual meeting. Each man who preached was blessed to deliver a clear edifying message. Which of those men should not have preached his message so that you could preach yours?" He didn't answer. Few preachers are so bold in their self-promotion, but the "me-first" spirit damages the effectiveness of many preachers who have a less intense case of the "me-disease." A fascinating episode appears in the second half of the third chapter of John's gospel. A dispute arose between some of John's disciples and the Jews regarding "purifying." ([Joh 3:25](#)) Since John was a Levite, he would know the intimate details of the Jewish concepts of purification. The record is silent regarding the reason, but John's disciples did not go to him for clarification about the question of purifying. They complained to him because Jesus appeared in their self-focused eyes to be in competition with John, "...*behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.*" ([Joh 3:26](#)) This scenario offers the perfect occasion for John to shift the focus of his ministry to himself, to insert himself into the limelight. How did he react? "*He must increase, but I must decrease,*" ([Joh 3:30](#)) should be the theme of every minister. In his response John used the analogy of a Jewish wedding. These events often covered several days and were lavish events. During the time the newly married couple was the constant center of attention. Rather than inject himself into prominence, John depicted himself as a friend of the groom whose sole interest was to ensure that the celebration went well, and that the couple, particularly the groom (more the center of attention than the bride in a first century Jewish wedding), were honored in the celebration. Over the years I have often heard and chuckled at the nearly endless list of humorous stories that are told about old preachers and their antics. We often need to chuckle and lighten up our warped sense of sour, joyless Christianity, a sad perversion of true faith in Christ. However, I've occasionally heard of rather sharp comments from some of those old preachers and wondered. If they could be so earthy and blunt in their interaction with people, why do so many people remember them and hold them in high regard? The thought occurs to me that many of these men must have been amazing preachers of the gospel. Despite honestly enjoying the humor in the stores, I'd love to know more about what-and how-these men preached. Elder C. H. Cayce is often mentioned in the context of his debates with men from other theological perspectives. Some of those debates were published and offer thorough insights into the beliefs of Elder Cayce and the men whom he debated. My uncle, Elder J. D. Holder, was personal friends with Elder Cayce. On one occasion he told about a personal experience that spoke volumes regarding Elder Cayce's integrity. The two men had been invited to preach a meeting some distance away from their homes, an area where neither man had visited before. On the first session of the meeting Elder Cayce preached a sermon that apparently sounded more like a debate than a sermon. Early the next morning the pastor of the church drove to the home where the two preachers were staying. He asked Elder Cayce to take a walk with him for a private conversation. Later Elder Cayce told my uncle about the visit. The pastor rebuked Elder Cayce for the spirit of his message with "Elder, we know what those folks believe, and we don't believe what they do. Some of them are our neighbors, and several of them came to service last night to hear you preach. We didn't invite you here to debate them or their preachers. We invited you here to preach the gospel." All day long Elder Cayce walked around the farm where they were staying. My uncle said that every time he saw Elder Cayce he was walking briskly, hands behind his back, and staring at the

ground. As they were driving to the church that evening, Elder Cayce asked my uncle if he could speak first that night. When the time came for the preaching, Elder Cayce entered the pulpit and read [John 18:36](#), "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." My uncle, who spent time with Elder Cayce and often heard him preach, told me that this was without question the most powerful sermon that he ever heard Elder Cayce preach. This noble Christian man sincerely believed that his Lord was more important than he, and he graciously accepted the rebuke and corrected his problem. Rather than reacting like an arrogant egotist, Elder Cayce demonstrated the servant's heart. He was a faithful witness to a message that he deemed far more important than his ego. John never allowed the preeminence of Jesus to escape his focus when he preached and taught the people. "It is not about me. It is all about Him" is a clear description of John and his ministry. The litmus test of any person will appear in the heat of trial. When tested, will he look for escape from the difficulty, or will he stand true to his calling and testimony, even when subjected to intense pressure? In the moment of his greatest trial John stood the test. He rebuked a prominent official for his immoral lifestyle, a correct action, but one that cost him his life. Does it matter whether Christians belong to one of our political parties or the other? I say no, but it matters that Christians vote first based on the character of the candidate for office rather than on his political affiliation or his personality. May we live up to the integrity of our calling and be faithful witnesses.

Elder Joe Holder