

VISITING PROGRAM TRAINING CLASS

Fifteenth Class

April 13, 1969

FORMAT:

1. Open with prayer.
2. World news discussion and drill (5 - 8 minutes).
3. Difficult scripture drill (30 minutes).
4. Sermonettes and evaluations (30 minutes).
5. Recess (10 minutes).
6. Lecture (one hour).
7. Assignments for next class.

DIFFICULT SCRIPTURES

- I. Disprove: Christ preached to the spirits in prison while His body lay in the tomb (I Pet. 3:18-19).
 - A. This scripture does not say Christ preached to the spirits in prison during the time He was in the grave.
 - B. These wicked angels followed Satan in his rebellion against God (Isa. 14:12-14), and were put in prison (chains of darkness) for their folly (II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).
 - C. But when did Christ preach to them? "When once the longsuffering of God waited IN THE DAYS OF NOAH, while the ark was a preparing" (I Pet. 3:20). That's when Christ preached to the spirits -- in the days of Noah, not during the time He was in the grave.
 - D. Jesus died (I Cor. 15:3; Rev. 1:18). When He was dead, He was dead! The dead know nothing (Eccl. 9:5, 10). Their thoughts perish (Ps. 146:4).

Jesus could not possibly have preached to those wicked spirits while in His grave. Rather, He did this during the days of Noah.
- II. Are there some sins which one can commit and not incur the death penalty (I John 5:16)?
 - A. The wages of sin are death (Rom. 6:23). There are no exceptions! God does not categorize sin, but Hebrews 10:26-27 shows that it is a

willful sin which brings "fiery indignation" -- eternal death. Any other sin can be forgiven if it is repented of -- if it is "confessed" (I John 1:9).

- B. A sin "not unto death," then, is a sin for which forgiveness is available. It is a sin committed by someone who has not willfully turned from God. A sin "not unto death" might be the result of ignorance or weakness. The sin itself carries a death penalty, but it can be forgiven if the person repents.
- C. If any of us sees a brother who is striving to obey God and walk with God "sin a sin which is not unto death" -- sin out of ignorance or weakness - - we ought to ask God to help the brother recognize his error and repent of it. By doing so we will "give him life" -- God will hear our prayers for him. This is the kind of concern we ought to have for one another. This is one way that we can "bear" one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2).
- D. On the other hand, if the brother has sinned "unto death" -- if he has willfully and viciously turned from God's way and rejected God completely, we should not pray for him because God will not answer our prayer for him. This, by the way, would not include all disfellowshipped people -- ONLY those where it is determined that they have maliciously and totally rejected God's Way so that they could not be brought again to repentance (Heb. 6:4-6).

III. Disprove: It is a sin to drink wine (Prov. 23:29-31).

- A. This scripture does not say it is wrong to drink wine. It does say we should not tarry long at the wine (Verse 30). One who tarries long at wine becomes a winebibber, or in plain English, a drunkard and no drunkard will inherit God's Kingdom (Gal. 5:21).
- B. Verse 31 says don't look upon the wine when it is red, when it moveth itself aright. Of course the terms "red" and "moveth itself" refer to wine when it is in the process of fermentation. This is before the wine is fully fermented. If at this time you "look on it" so as to finally drink it, you will become sick and possibly even die. In fact, instances are recorded describing how winery workers have become asphyxiated by merely leaning over the wine vats "looking on" the fermenting wine and being overcome by the poisonous gases, falling into the vats and drowning!
- C. God's Word shows it is perfectly all right to drink wine in moderation. The first miracle Jesus performed was to turn water into wine (John 2:1-10). The Greek word here translated wine is "omos." And it means fermented

wine.

The Apostle Paul even advised Timothy to drink some wine for his stomach problems (I Tim. 5:23).

- D. God gave us wine and alcoholic beverages to learn to use them properly -- and to develop character by the proper exercise of wisdom and self-control. Prohibition is not God's way -- and it does not develop character. The proper use of alcohol is a great responsibility. But it is only the wrong use which becomes sin.

HOW TO COUNSEL THE BRETHREN

I. WHAT THE SCRIPTURES SAY

Before we get into actual examples of how to counsel the brethren, let's notice some of the principles laid down in the Scriptures for those giving advice. You men in this class need to understand these basic principles before you try giving advice to others.

* NOTE: Turn to each of the following scriptures with a very brief explanation.

James 3:1-2 Verse One could be translated, "Be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment." This says teachers of others will be judged with greater severity. Verse 2 cautions us about offending others. So watch giving advice! Be cautious and wise. This whole chapter shows that the tongue can do great damage if it is misused.

Matt. 12:36-37 "Every idle word" means useless, careless, or harmful words. We must make sure that we do not give careless or harmful advice. We will have to give account to Christ in the Day of Judgment.

Matt. 18:6 Christ is talking about little children here, but let's apply this verse to God's people who are little children spiritually. The principle applies. This is a strong warning not to offend or cause to stumble anyone who believes in Christ. Someone who does this carelessly and won't repent might as well jump in a lake with a rock around his neck!

I Cor. 1:26-27 In giving advice we need to remember that God, in most cases, has called the weak of the world. Most

of God's people are not able to make wise decisions. They have not been taught to think or use their minds. It will be up to many of you men in this class to teach God's people the principles of how to make wise decisions for themselves

- I Tim. 3:2 Notice that one of the qualifications of an elder is that he must be "able to teach." You men should be able to explain God's Word and ways clearly to God's people. This is a great responsibility and yet a great blessing because God inspired -- "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and doctrine" (I Tim. 5:17).
- II Tim. 2:15 The thing to do then is study so that you know God's Word. You must know and understand your Bible in order to give wise counsel.
- II Tim. 2:23, 24 Verse 23 gives wise advice about avoiding foolish questions that cause argument and are not edifying. And Verse 24 points out the approach to use in counseling. Be gentle and patient in your teaching. Titus 3:9 also mentions that you should avoid foolish questions because they are unprofitable and vain. Be alert to questions that are not profitable
- Prov. 9:10 Wisdom comes from fearing to disobey God's laws. Understanding comes with a knowledge of and obedience to God's laws. (Also Psalms 111:10.) The more you obey God, the more wisdom and knowledge you will have to counsel God's people.
- Prov. 10:20-21 Notice the first sentence of each of these verses. If you are righteous (Keeping God's commandments) you will be able to feed many spiritually.
- Prov. 12:18 The tongue of the wise brings spiritual health.
- Prov. 14:12 To give wise counsel you must know the difference between the way that seems right to man and God's way (Prov. 16:25)
- Prov. 15:22,23 Your counsel should help establish purposes and bring joy and goodness to the members' lives. Verse 28 says, "The heart of the righteous studies

to answer."

- Prov. 16:1 The answer of the tongue is from God. God can inspire you to give right answers. Verses 23 and 24 show the effect of wise counsel.
- Prov. 18:21 This is a mighty important verse. The advice you give can help a person toward eternal life or possibly cause him to stumble and fall and end up in the lake of fire!
- Prov. 27:5; 28:23 These verses show that it is oftentimes necessary to point out a person's faults in order to help him. You men who visit will need to remember that, "Open rebuke is better than secret love." But also remember the powerful effect of what you say. So always speak in love and consider the person's eternal life!

The above verses show the awesome responsibility of visiting and counseling God's people. Let's find out now how you can be sure to give wise counsel and not be a stumbling block or offense to those you are trying to serve.

II HOW TO GIVE WISE COUNSEL

1. Ask God for Wisdom

The real key in giving wise counsel is to have the wisdom of God. God says He will give you wisdom if you ask in faith (Jas. 1:5). Go to God then in believing prayer. Know that He is there and more willing to give than you are to ask. Men, God wants you to have wisdom, but He will give it only to those who will use it to serve others. If you are God's servant, trying to help others, God will back you up. He will guide your mind and inspire you. You must believe this in order to be a wise counselor. You must know that God will guide and direct you as you strive to serve His people.

2. Draw Upon Biblical Examples

The Bible is filled with examples for us to use in making right decisions. Some examples show the results of wrong decisions. Many others show the positive results of following God's way. Paul was inspired to write, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). The Scriptures were written to teach us God's way -- to show us His decisions. And in I Corinthians 10:11 Paul said,

"Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition? upon whom the ends of the world are come." The Scriptures give examples for our admonition. They warn us against wrong decisions by showing the results of disobedience to God's way. As Christ said, we should live by every Word of God. So strive to give counsel based upon examples in God's Word. The result will be wise counsel.

3. Get All the Facts and "Read Between the Lines"

If you don't have all the facts, you will be giving counsel based upon limited knowledge. Wise counsel can only be given after you have taken time to obtain as many facts as possible. Don't be hurried or pushed into giving your advice without getting the facts. This is not wise! It is up to you to draw a person out before you give your advice or recommendation. Wise counsel can only be based upon true and adequate facts.

Don't be naive! Many times people put forth surface "facts" which don't reveal the true reason behind their problems. For instance, some men or women talk about their family arguments - - being too embarrassed to acknowledge that the root of their problem is actually sex frustration and ignorance. Others, of course, may have far worse problems involving alcoholism, dope addiction or perversion of some sort -- yet, in spite of a "nice" facade, you sense something is deeply wrong. Ask God for discernment. Ask Him to bring to light thoughts, tendencies and facts which will help you solve problems people desperately want and need help with, but somehow CANNOT make themselves "vomit up" and fully bring out in the open until you have the discernment to trigger this response!

4. Consider Attitude and Personal Problems

The attitude and problems of an individual must definitely be considered if you want to give wise counsel. A person in a wrong attitude might not be receptive. You may need to advise him to repent before you can even try to help him with his problems. Try to discern each person's attitude and consider this in what advice you might give. If you don't know their personal problems, visit with them until you do know their main problems. Wise advice that will be specific and helpful can only be given if you know the main problems and attitudes of the person you are counseling.

5. Give Personalized Advice

After praying for wisdom, using Bible examples, gathering all the facts and considering the person's attitude and problems, then you should give

your advice on their question or problem. You should think about that particular person and his individual need. Tailor your advice to fit his circumstances. Make your advice personal. Really try to help. Put yourself in his shoes and try to understand the way he feels. Have compassion -- be soft hearted. But don't be soft headed! Give that person the advice he needs - - not necessarily what he might want to hear. Remember the proverb that says, "Open rebuke is better than secret love."

6. Encourage and Exhort Them to Follow Your Advice

Sometimes when the advice given is not what the individual wanted to hear they will be disappointed and discouraged. You will need to follow up your advice with a "pep talk" encouraging them to apply your advice. Explain why you gave what advice you did. Help them to understand what is best for them. Exhort them to take action and do something about their problem. This point could make the difference in whether or not your time and counsel is wasted or used. If you don't inspire them to want to do right, they may do nothing.

7. Let Them Make Their Own Decisions

Notice that you have been instructed to give your advice based upon God's Word, not to tell them what to do. Let them decide whether or not they will follow your advice. Don't make their decisions for them. Let them build their own character Your job will be to show them what God says. Let them decide whether or not they will follow that way. They must choose by themselves which way they will go! As mentioned above, you should certainly encourage them to follow your advice and make a right decision based upon God's Word, but don't tell them exactly what decision they should make. This is not God's way. They will not be learning to make wise decisions unless you let them. So, let the brethren live their own lives. Let them make their own decisions.

III. QUESTIONS ASKED AND ANSWERED AT MINISTERIAL CONFERENCES

In order to illustrate the above principles, the following examples may be helpful.

- Q. Some antagonistic wives still run their families and have control over Christmas trees, activities of the children, doctors and medicine for children when sick, etc. The husbands, even after years of conversion, often remain weak or gain back little of the ground lost in the previous years of marriage.

How far should a man go? How long should he continue to "give in"? When

should he put his foot down and take a stand, even if it means separation?

A. Ministers must not run a member's life for him. This man may be too weak to put his foot down and make any changes. We must teach what God says and let the man make his own decision. The general principle is that the man, as the head of the home, should not permit paganism in his home. Don't encourage the people to become weak. The minister needs to perceive what manner of man he is working with and his ability to act with tact, wisdom and power and advise him accordingly. He should not allow it, but if he is too weak or tactless, we do not condemn him for not being able to do that which the mature Christian man should do. This is not compromising God's principles or laws, but giving advice within the scope of the man's ability and understanding.

Q. Isn't it true that the man should throw out all leaven (during the Days of Unleavened Bread) in spite of vehement opposition and divorce threats from an unconverted wife? Or is the kitchen the wife's "part of the house" and under her jurisdiction?

A. This is the same principle as the one above. Ideally, he should throw it out, but all men cannot. The ministers are to teach the Church until we grow up to the measure and stature of Jesus Christ.

Q. What should we do about weak brethren who resort to drugs and operations for healing?

A. A few of our people have thought if they went to a doctor they would be excommunicated from the Church. We don't need to be in such fear of the doctors as we have been, but should certainly not look to them for healing. Whether or not a person calls a doctor is his own business. Never advise a person not to call a doctor -- it is his decision: Can God heal you? Definitely yes: Will He? That depends on whether or not you have the faith. It is strictly a personal matter. The Church does not dictate your faith -- it simply explains God's Word. Watch old wives' tales and home remedies. There are times to call a doctor in order to find out what is wrong. People have died because of a lack of knowledge. Concentrate on Matthew 8 and 9 -- Christ's broken, beaten back, not the affliction.

The minister should comfort the people, buoy them up, encourage them and point them to God in their hour of trial. Don't put them in fear if they weaken. If they weaken and have a major operation, we do not put them out. It may not be a major sin, but a weakness as long as their attitude is right. Work with them to help them build more faith later and trust God for healing. We must teach what is sin and what is righteousness. It is up to the people what decision they make. The brethren must

live by their own faith. Obviously, a new member probably won't have reached the same high plateau of faith in God to heal that, say, a long-time deacon should have reached!

Q. In regard to children who have parents opposing God's truth and try to make them do things contrary to God's laws: Suppose a child in his early teens understands the truth of the Sabbath Day but the parents "make" that child do chores on the Sabbath. How far can a child of this early age go in refusing to obey his parents "in the Lord"?

A. If the Church tells the child to disobey his parents, the Church is liable. We must be very careful in advising these children. Once a child is old enough to really understand, he must decide whether or not he will obey God rather than man, and be willing to take the consequences. It is a matter of the child's faith and it is strictly the child's decision. We cannot legislate for him. Often the young child may be using the doctrines of the Church as an excuse to rebel. The Church's position is extreme caution and we must never directly teach children to disobey parents. If we are sure the child is not mentally mature, we should advise him to continue to study and obey what he knows as his parents permit.

IV. ADVICE GIVEN ON COUNSELLING AT MINISTERIAL CONFERENCES

"Let people live their own lives. We should be wise, gentle, easy to be entreated, not psychologists who analyze and tear apart people. Never back down in the face of a wrong attitude though. Another thing, all of us are advisors in one way or another. We need to be very careful about what we advise.

"Many of us have an exclusivist attitude and are wary of outsiders. Jesus Christ never had a converted person to deal with. Some people can be little ones spiritually and look like way-out ding-a-lings. We shouldn't flee in horror. Many of us are far too Pharisaical. With regard to disfellowships, instead of lambasting them, we should leave them in sorrow, expressing deep hope and fervency that they will repent and change and return -- not making them angry at us personally. Stop treating people with fear or Don't go to the other extreme and start hobnobbing with the world and being like them. A servant of Jesus Christ has a true humanitarian spirit" (Jas. 3:17).

V. SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

A. Take the job of counseling the brethren seriously. Don't be rash or careless with your words. Don't give advice if you are not sure it is right. If you can't give wise advice based upon facts, then be honest

and say you don't have an answer. Tell them you will check with your superiors and try to get an answer for them if it is possible. Most of the brethren will take your advice seriously, so be careful -- their eternal life is at stake!

- B. Follow the seven points on giving wise counsel. Especially ask God for wisdom. This is a key point. Wisdom is a gift from God and you must have it in order to give wise counsel.
- C. Don't make decisions for the brethren. Give them godly advice and encourage them to make their own decisions. This way they will build character and learn to stand on their own two feet.
- D. Use the approach brought out at the Ministerial Conferences. Don't involve the Church in their personal problems. Let them know we want to help them, but don't put the Church on the spot by "telling" or "commanding" people to do this or that in their private lives. Just show them what the Bible teaches. Try not to give advice that some irate "member" might later use against you or the Church. In other words, always think about whether or not you are endangering the Church by your advice.
- E. On the other hand, don't be afraid to be specific and pointed where spiritual advice is given. On matters that are absolute, like obedience to God (keeping His commandments), be dogmatic and strong with God's people. Their salvation is at stake! There is a fine line here and you must have discernment to know when to give specific and pointed advice, when to be strong and when to just suggest. Much wisdom along this line comes from experience in visiting and counseling. It will be gained in time.
- F. Have faith in God. Visiting and counseling God's people is an awesome responsibility. It is also one of the most important and needed ways to serve. Some of you men in this class who have real faith in God will apply this lesson and gain the wisdom you need to be a counselor to God's people. You will be richly rewarded -- "they that be wise (or teachers, see margin) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12:3)!