

Dear brothers and of the Solid Rock Association,

It is with much prayer, contemplation and study that I attempt to put into words what I feel God has put upon my heart to write for our annual Circular Letter. I do not pretend to be an impressive linguist or someone gifted with words. I am a mere servant to our Holy Father and desire nothing but to help spread his good works and spirit to a lost and dying world. I have no intention of bolstering myself nor do I wish to hurt anyone who reads this. It is my sincere prayer that you will look over my shortcomings and bear with me, and know that I love all of you.

Our world is growing further away from God with each passing day. I worry over my children, as I know each of you do the same. Not only for our children, but all our friends and loved ones, whether saved or unsaved. Our churches, and this association, have to be a light in the darkness that is surrounding us, trying to choke us out. That is our sole purpose while we remain on earth, to reach out to those who do not confess a hope in the lord. To fight back against a cruel and dark world that is trying to pull us asunder and drive wedges between us. To keep us too busy fighting with ourselves and with one another that we miss the opportunity that God has given us to work for him, by bringing the lost into the fold.

In the book of Titus chapter 3, Paul writes:

3 For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

4 But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared,

5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

This association and all our churches need to remember and hold to the greatest thing that Jesus demonstrated while here on earth. That is to show love towards one another. If we remember nothing else, let us never forget that. If others wish to find fault with us, let them only find fault in our willingness to always show love towards one another and to all God's children. To be merciful, forgiving, sincere, and most importantly, to love one another.

This world can be likened unto the law and the Pharisees, full of condemnation and judgement. In the gospel of Mathew, Jesus bid his disciples to prepare a meal of corn, even though according to the law it was not allowed as it was the Sabbath day. When the Pharisees condemned them for it, Jesus answered:

3 "Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him;

4 How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?"

Jesus' example here is one of love and mercy, not of traditions or rules. He is trying to show the Pharisees the difference between what the world (or law) says is important, and what is truly meaningful. Later when Jesus went into the synagogue, they beheld a man whose hand was withered. In order to find fault with him and accuse him, the Pharisees asked: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" Jesus' answer was again one of love and mercy:

11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days.

13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

Here again we can witness one of many such acts in which Jesus attempted to demonstrate to the world the true meaning of being a child of God, to always show love towards each other, forsaking the rituals, traditions and rules we are so easily beset by.

I can remember in my youth, before I was a Christian, the feeling I got when I walked into the House of David Church in Attica, Michigan. It was not a feeling of judgement or of condemnation, but one of love and kindness. I was never asked if I followed this rule or that rule, or what trouble I had been in to the night before, but was greeted with a sincere hug and a smile. I was greeted with love. Had it not have been for that love I felt, I cannot say that I would be able to call myself a child of God today. No matter what darkness I surrounded myself with and no matter what trouble I got into, I remembered that feeling and it stuck with me always. Love is how we reach the lost.

While our Association grows and we are blessed to take new members out into the water for baptizing, we all need to understand that we are not blessed to do such by any good work any of us have done, or by any righteousness we ourselves possess. It is but by the mere mercy and love of Jesus our Father. Legalism is the path to self-righteousness. Mercy and love is the path to God. We too often try to lead God down the path that we feel is right, when we really need to let God lead us. The bible says in the book of Romans chapter 4:

1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Here, Paul is giving us the example to follow; believe first, let God lead us and we will see the fruit of our efforts. All things begin with belief. When I was a lost sinner I *believed* I was destined for hell. I *believed* that the love I felt when I went to church was real; tangible. When I laid down my life at the lord's feet, I *believed* that he saved me. When I was struggling with my calling to preach, I *believed* that it was what God was calling me to do. And now, I *believe* God has blessed our churches and our Association because we have tried to put him first. Let us never forget our calling.

My life is one full of peaks and valleys. Looking back on it, I seem to behold a pattern. Whenever I have tried to lead God, or do what I thought was best, I have made a mess of things. Those are the times in my life when I've been in the lowest valleys. On the rare occasions in my life when I have laid everything in the hands of the Lord, those are the times he has led me to my peaks. We must understand that the natural man is constantly at war with the spirit. We as an association cannot ever let ourselves become led by the flesh or by any of our own selfish desires. As Paul warned the Romans in chapter 10:

“For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”

Let us instead know when to hold our tongues, when to speak and when not to, when to insert ourselves and when to let God lead. Let us always remember that this association is comprised of individual churches and that the association itself holds no power over any of them, and that each one may be a little different, and that's ok. As long as we continue to put the Lord first and focus on calling sinner men and women home, looking over the small differences that we all have, I truly believe that the Lord will bless us.

Dear brothers and sisters of the Solid Rock Association, I pray that we continue to grow and prosper, always giving the glory to God, and always in love. For if we fail to act and behave in a manner that does not demonstrate love, first and foremost, I promise that we will stop growing. I love each and every one of you. May God bless you all, and may God bless our association.

Your brother in Christ,

Elder Jeremy D. Newsom.