

**The Folly of the Flagellant Man**

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The Pensive Warrior

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What happens when a man is never praised for doing good? Will he continue to do it? Will he continue to drudge along when no one cares, as good as whatever he has set his mind to do may be? Will he toil to no end for something no one in his life apparently appreciates, whether they secretly do or no? Of course not. His motivation will be sapped until it runs dry. Like a reservoir from which one only ever drains but never fills, his desire to do what is good shall soon run its course. And when it has been run, then it shall be no more.

As the good Lord noted, and informed us through Moses (Genesis 2:16) and Solomon (Proverbs 18:1), “it is not good for man to be alone,” and “a man who seeks isolation breaks out against all sound wisdom.” Now, there are many ways in which such a state of affairs is not good. Not least among these is the lack of motivation it does bring when there is no one else there to keep that flame alight inside one’s soul. “As iron sharpens iron, so one man raiseth the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17). And without such a friend, who is there to lift up that man’s spirits? Who is there to raiseth his countenance? No one, and so he shall sink into the depths of oblivion. Unsurprisingly so to those who have ears to hear and a good head between them.

We all should know this who are old enough to have borne the weight of fools lording over us. Who among us has not had one so aloof as to spurn us more than to lift us up, to the point it seems that never a good word was uttered which one could recall? And what terrors does that for one’s will to go forth. At such a crossroads, there are but two paths. Either the poor sap can dispense with any care for the words of the fool, or drown into the depths of despair and death. However, one can only choose the former at this fork if there is a light somewhere to be found. If not, it is only into the Pit of Sheol he may go.

And how oft have men been cropped up as if they were examples of humility to look toward who are nothing more than self-loathing masochists who pervert the very essence of masculine strength? How oft does one bear witness to effeminate men who castigate themselves in a pretentious sense in piety, as if he could never do anything of note, but yet who is held up as if he were a man to hear? For if one were to be as such whom young men may see and model after, then such a man would certainly be a capable chap himself who knows what he is and is not; and who can rightly tell as much with honor and dignity. Yet, too oft I have seen the opposite. Men who would tear themselves down in self-abasement and acknowledge no goodness as good and just folly as folly; men who ramble on as if hosting some self-imposed, communist struggle session, and then patting oneself on the back.

The flagellant man makes of all things a soteriological issue. Certainly, on the seat of final judgement, all one's righteous deeds are as filthy rags before the Lord, insofar as one seeks to cite them for his own justification (Isaiah 64:6). Yet, the same does not extend to our Theonomical dealings with other men, and we in no wise inspire our kin unto goodness by casting aspersions upon any and all that is good at worst, while failing to ever recognize that which is good as good at best. When doing so, what separates such a man from those of woe; those wicked fiends who put light for dark and good for ill (Isaiah 5:20)? Not much, if anything at all, in the real world. And that is the trouble caused by the flagellant man.

It is no wonder then that so many struggle in our day as we do. I mean we as a nation, as a culture; not as individuals, of course, if I may. You listening to my voice here today may not share in this burden personally. Indeed, I commend thy so if not. Though I would imagine most of us would be hard-pressed in the English-speaking world to live lives without ever knowing someone affected by despair born from a lack of adequate encouragement, either in the present

or the past. In all honesty, this is something I find I still struggle with to this day. For as the Lord would say again through Solomon, “much study does weary the body, and there is no end to the writing of books” (Ecclesiastes 12:12). That is a comfort to know, but also a burden to endure. And how can one subsist forever in such labors when the encouragement needed is slack? Indeed, one cannot. Not for long. Not for long.

Now, if you tell a man this, he is oft ready enough to acknowledge such things when brought to the forefront of his mind. Yet, what about when such things are pushed into the back? Then, my friends, is when we get to see who a man truly is. When he operates subconsciously, out of the habits he has formed in his day. Then, we see what man he is and has shaped himself to be. For any man can do good when you tell him what to do. But what about when he’s left to his own devices? What does he do then? Does he continue on the right path, or fall astray into rebellion against his own vows?

When a man gets up and sins against himself and against the Lord by overeating and underexerting, does he do so out of a conscious desire to do evil unto his own body? Not likely. The more apt explanation is that he has formed a habit of gorging himself on an abundance of food, for the restriction of one’s diet is a habit itself, and habits must be formed. The good habits are the product of self-discipline, and the bad ones manifest from the lack thereof. So it is with all things a man does without thinking, since he has trained himself to do it as part of his routine, either to his benefit or detriment.

Those habits, my brethren, are what really matter most. And those roots of our normal behaviors that govern us more readily than any conscious thought are what more concerns me than anything a man might avow when poked and prodded, guided as he may be toward right thought by a good teacher. And certainly, men can be found here and there who will say the right

things under such tutelage. The question then is, having grown and lived so long among men who I would call my brothers and sisters who lack for such things, and even seeing such lack in myself at times; the question is this: how do we truly move from consciously knowing what is good and right to actually doing it without a second thought? How do we teach men who are otherwise learned in so many of the right ways to amend those still crucial points at which they do falter? If we can discern that, my friends, we may yet turn back the tide of loneliness and despair that grips so many hearts. Not just in our own little part of the world, but across it all more and more.

I tell you, my brothers and sisters, the answer to this question is not what one might think. For the solution to such a problem is not so direct. To illustrate this, I would first ask another question. How can you encourage someone in meaningful ways with whom you do not have a meaningful connection? How can you raise the countenance of a man you don't know? Obviously, you cannot.

So then, before we can contemplate how to reverse the downward spiral of a self-hating people who are loath to say anything good about that which is good, we must first come to know how it is that men bond with one another, and do so truly. In fact, after so doing, one might find the issue of a lack of encouragement fades away as if it were never even there. For if a man loves his neighbor as himself, and indeed calls him a friend, he will in truth be invested in the goodwill of that man and in the furtherance of his good works. And in such a mode, to encourage one another as befitting of those friends who love each other truly, why, that is a most natural thing to occur. It is no arcane art, hidden away but from the minds of tireless sages. Rather, it is the simple deed carried out by even the smallest child. Such kindness comes as intuitively as breathing, as long as one knows how to speak.

The answer then, to our troubles and woes; to the unending toil one may feel at pushing ever toward a righteous end, yet with no one there to help him along, is but a humble thing we all do know. It is to love one another, and to do so truly, not halfheartedly. That is easy to know, but also easy to forget; to overlook. For to love each other truly requires an investment in the life of another that is itself not so easy to make and all too easy to set aside. It is not a task one can sustain alone, and if but one link in the chain of a lineage that does lift up each new link is broken, what a terrible effort it is to try and remake that line.

Think of the literal. Is it easier to maintain a chain-link fence, or to forge a new one? What is required of each? The maintenance thereof, to keep the chain clean and oiled, and to protect it from destructive force. Whereas the forging of a new chain. Why, that is a much more substantial task. It involves the mining of ore and the production of steel, then the forging thereof into a new chain. So too is this task in the metaphorical as it is in the literal. That is, the forging of new bonds, or the repair of those broken, is a much bigger project than the maintenance of one already made and healthy. And no one link makes a chain of itself, but only in bondage with another.

And no bond between two kin does keep itself. Unrequited love is love that dies. It shall not prosper on the vine once broken, but will surely wither unto death. And a young tree once planted is not so strong. The beasts of the ground and the cold of the air may tear it down before it can bloom enough to sustain itself. What hope then is there to forge such bonds? To reach out and make friends most true with love that triumphs through and through? What chance is there? What can man do? It may be that all is this, to do our best and hope it be so, trusting in God to do the rest. I know not what lies ahead, in nearest days that make our stead. But I can be sure of this: those who love not, God shall resist.

What can you do then, if you feel worn to do what's right, alone and wanting for those to help you along with what may be? Remember what you have known from times of old. For whatever you measure out to others, it shall be measured back to you, either for good or ill (Luke 6:38). Better days are the fruit of better men, and better men are the fruit of better men. Thus, if you find no one to encourage you to still do good, first find someone who you can encourage as you seek to be. And do so, day after day, without end, whether it may be returned or not. Trust me when I say that God takes notice of such deeds, and He will repay, both good and ill. He will not leave you wanting for long.

And when next you encounter that flagellant man who never recognizes good in himself, and thus lacks in his inspiration of others to greatness, be sure to address him with care and reverence after you have gained his trust. Hearken him back to true humility, not the false aberration thereof. Call him to the fruit of that humility which is honest of both good and ill, thus lifting up, rather than speaking only of ill and tearing down. If he will listen, it shall be to his good and the good of all amidst him. If he shall not, the Lord shall deal with him as the foolish king who no longer listens to correction (Ecclesiastes 4:13).

Above all, never weary in doing good, my brethren, but keep heart and keep faith. It shall all be worth it in the end. May God bless you and all those in the hearing of these words. Amen.

## Reference

*King James Bible*. (2017). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1769).