

RT Kendall: When Holy Spirit Vindicates You

Do you know what it is like to be unvindicated? This means that your reputation is under a cloud. You would love to have your name cleared, to have both your friends and your enemies see you as having been falsely accused or misunderstood.

This was the position in which the Israelites found themselves after they crossed the Jordan on dry land. So God ordered Joshua to circumcise all the men who had been born since they left Egypt 40 years before (Josh. 5:5). It was a sign of the covenant, going back to Abraham (Gen. 17:9-11). Circumcision showed that they were unashamedly the people of God. When the circumcising was finished, the Lord told Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you" (Josh. 5:9b, ESV).

The word "reproach" means "shame." It means to bear a stigma; to be discredited, dishonored or disgraced. It refers to the way you are perceived or how you think you are perceived. It is embarrassing because it punctures your pride.

Sadly, Christians today are not very respected. They are often laughed at, mocked, put down, seen as mostly ignorant and not held in high esteem. This is in contrast to the way Christians in the earliest church were regarded: "None" of the unbelievers "dare join them [that is, Christians], but the people held them in high esteem" (Acts 5:13).

I believe that because of the lack of respect, many in the church today have an inferiority complex. We know we are not esteemed. It hurts. No one fears God; no one fears the church. The world thumbs their noses at us and we look like helpless infants. We are like the Israelites before the "reproach of Egypt" was rolled away from them.

We need to be reminded that our enemy, the devil, is

resistible: “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7b); “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith” (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

One purpose of the roar of a lion is to scare other animals off. The effect of a satanic attack is often to scare us and make us think we are defeated when we are not; to make us think we have given in when we haven’t. As John said, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4b).

A part of the “reproach of Egypt” is the way we perceive ourselves. It is traceable to the way we are perceived. We know that the world laughs at us and does not respect us.

But we must resist listening to the mocking of the world; it is the same as listening to the devil. Don’t believe the devil. The devil is a liar (John 8:44). And yet, as William Perkins (1558-1602) put it, “Don’t believe the devil, even when he tells the truth!” The devil will not only quote Scripture but also point to what the world says about us. The purpose is to intimidate us and demoralize us.

God does not want us to have the reproach of Egypt; but there is a reproach that He does want us to have, namely, bearing a stigma for the glory of Christ’s name. This is a reproach that we should welcome. It is an internal vindication, vindication by the Spirit.

Jesus was “vindicated by the Spirit” (1 Tim. 3:16). It was an internal indication—what He had in His heart—the total approval of the Father. This approval was noted at His baptism: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17b). It was manifested again when He was transfigured before the disciples: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (Matt. 17:5b).

Jesus never was vindicated externally. The Pharisees did not

believe in Him. The 5,000 who followed him after He fed them with the loaves and fish dwindled to the 12 (John 6:66-67). Herod did not vindicate him. Neither did Pilate. The Jews demanded His crucifixion. His vindication came from the Father by the Spirit.

Even after He was resurrected, there was no external vindication. Did he go to Herod's or Pilate's house on Easter morning and say, "Surprise!"? Certainly not. He could have, but His vindication would continue to be internal, that is, what was revealed by the Holy Spirit.

To this very day, He is still being vindicated by the Spirit. It continued at Pentecost when 3,000 were converted. This was by the Spirit. When you and I were converted, it was the work of the Holy Spirit (John 6:44). We did not see Him face to face. His external vindication will come one day when, after His second coming, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).

In the meantime, you and I must get our vindication as Jesus did. Although He was given the Spirit "without measure" (John 3:34), you and I have a "measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3). We must not look to people for approval. We get our vindication internally—as Jesus did. It is by the Spirit that we are enabled to seek only the approval of God (John 5:44).

That means we let our critics pick us to pieces. We let them call us fools. We let them say things that make us look stupid. The essence of the stigma is a feeling of being embarrassed. And yet if we truly—truly—embrace the reproach for the name of Christ, we will be like Peter and John. They rejoiced over the inestimable privilege of suffering "dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41).

How can we do this? Answer: because we know we have the truth.

And truth is the best vindication against slander.

Excerpted from chapter eight of We've Never Been This Way Before by R.T. Kendall (Charisma House 2020).