

Breaking the Alabaster Box

Anyone who serves God will discover sooner or later that the great hindrance to his work is not others but himself. He will discover that his outward man and his inward man are not in harmony, for both are tending toward opposite directions.

He will also sense the inability of his outward man to submit to the Spirit's control, thus rendering him incapable of obeying God's highest commands. He will quickly detect that the greatest difficulty lies in his outward man, for it hinders him from using his spirit.

Many of God's servants are not able to do even the most elementary works. Ordinarily they should be enabled by the exercise of their spirits to know God's Word, to discern the spiritual condition of another, to send forth God's messages under anointing and to receive God's revelations.

Yet due to the distractions of the outward man, their spirit does not seem to function properly. It is basically because their outward man has never been dealt with. For this reason revival, zeal, pleading and activity are only a waste of time. As we shall see, there is just one basic dealing that

can enable
man to be useful before God: brokenness.

The Inward Man and the Outward Man

Notice how the Bible divides
man into two parts: “For I delight in the law of God according
to the
inward man” (Rom. 7:22, NKJV). Our inward man delights in the
law of
God. “To be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the
inner man”
(Eph. 3:16). And Paul also tells us, “Even though our outward
man is
perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (2
Cor.
4:16).

When God comes to indwell us
by His Spirit, life and power, He comes into our spirit, which
we are
calling “the inward man.” Outside of this inward man is the
soul—the
seat of our thoughts, emotions and will. The outermost man is
our
physical body.

Thus we will speak of the
inward man as the spirit, the outer man as the soul and the
outermost
man as the body. We must never forget that our inward man is
the human
spirit where God dwells, where His Spirit mingles with our
spirit.

Just as we are dressed in
clothes, so our inward man “wears” our outward man: the spirit
“wears”

the soul. And similarly, the spirit and soul “wear” the body. It is quite evident that men are generally more conscious of the outer and outermost man, and they hardly recognize or understand their spirits at all.

We must know that he who can work for God is the one whose inward man can be released, just as the fragrance was released when Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with oil of spikenard (see John 12:3). The basic difficulty of a servant of God lies in the failure of the inward man to break through the outward man.

Therefore we must recognize before God that the first difficulty to our work is not in others but in ourselves. Our spirit seems to be wrapped in a covering so that it cannot easily break forth. If we have never learned how to release our inward man by breaking through the outward man, we are not able to serve.

Nothing can so hinder us as this outward man. Whether our works are fruitful depends on whether our outward man has been broken by the Lord so that the inward man can pass through that brokenness and come forth.

This is the basic problem. The Lord wants to break our outward man in order that the

inward man may
have a way out. When the inward man is released, both
unbelievers and
Christians will be blessed.

As a Grain of Wheat

The Lord Jesus tells us in
John 12:24, “‘Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground
and dies, it
remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.’” Life
is in the
grain of wheat, but there is a hard shell on the outside. As
long as
that shell is not split open, the wheat cannot sprout and
grow.

“‘Unless a grain of wheat
falls into the ground and dies...’” What is this death? It is
the
cracking open of the shell through the working together of
temperature
and humidity in the soil. Once the shell is split open, the
wheat begins
to grow. So the question here is not whether there is life
within, but
whether the outside shell is cracked open.

The Scripture continues by
saying, “‘He who loves his life [Greek, soul] will lose it,
and he who
hates his life [Greek, soul] in this world will keep it for
eternal
life’” (v. 25). The Lord shows us here that the outer shell is
our own
life (our soul life), while the life within is the eternal
life that He
has given to us.

To allow the inner life to come forth, it is imperative that the outward life be replaced. Should the outward remain unbroken, the inward would never be able to come forth.

It is necessary (in this writing) that we direct these words to that group of people who have the Lord's life. Among those who possess the life of the Lord can be found two distinct groups: one includes those in whom life is confined, restricted, imprisoned and unable to come forth; the other includes those in whom the Lord has forged a way, and life is thus released from them.

The question thus is not how to obtain life but rather how to allow this life to come forth. When we say we need the Lord to break us, this is not merely a way of speaking, nor is it only a doctrine. It is vital that we be broken by the Lord.

It is not that the life of the Lord cannot cover the earth but rather that His life is imprisoned by us. It is not that the Lord cannot bless the church but that the Lord's life is so confined within us that there is no flowing forth. If the outward man remains unbroken, we can never be a blessing to His church, and we cannot expect the Word of God to be blessed by

Him
through us!

Why the Box Must Be Broken

The Bible tells of the pure
spikenard. God purposely used this term "pure" in His Word to
show that
it is truly spiritual. But if the alabaster box is not broken,
the pure
spikenard will not flow forth.

Strange to say, many are
still treasuring the alabaster box, thinking that its value
exceeds that
of the ointment. Many think that their outward man is more
precious
than their inward man. This becomes the problem in the church.

One will treasure his
cleverness, thinking he is quite important; another will
treasure his
own emotions, esteeming himself as an important person; others
highly
regard themselves, feeling they are better than others, their
eloquence
surpasses that of others, their quickness of action and
exactness of
judgment are superior, and so forth. However, we are not
antique
collectors; we are not vase admirers; we are those who desire
to smell
only the fragrance of the ointment.

Without the breaking of the
outward, the inward will not come forth. Thus individually we
have no
flowing out, and the church does not have a living way. Why

then should
we hold ourselves as so precious, if our outward man contains,
instead
of releases, the fragrance?

The Holy Spirit has not
ceased working. One event after another, one thing after
another, comes
to us. Each disciplinary working of the Holy Spirit has but
one purpose:
to break our outward man so that our inward man may come
through.

Yet here is our difficulty:
We fret over trifles, we murmur at small losses. The Lord is
preparing a
way to use us, yet scarcely has His hand touched us when we
feel
unhappy, even to the extent of quarrelling with God and
becoming
negative in our attitude.

Since being saved, we have
been touched many times in various ways by the Lord, all with
the
purpose of breaking our outward man. Whether we are conscious
of it or
not, the aim of the Lord is to break this outward man.

So the Treasure is in the
earthen vessel, but if the earthen vessel is not broken, who
can see the
Treasure within? What is the final objective of the Lord's
working in
our lives?

It is to break this earthen
vessel, to break our alabaster box, to crack open our shell.

The Lord

longs to find a way to bless the world through those who belong to Him.

Brokenness is the way of

blessing, the way of fragrance, the way of fruitfulness, but it is also a path sprinkled with blood. Yes, there is blood from many wounds.

When we offer ourselves to

the Lord to be at His service, we cannot afford to be lenient, to spare

ourselves. We must allow the Lord utterly to crack our outward man so

that He may find a way for His outworking.

Each of us must find out for

himself what is the mind of the Lord in his life. It is a most lamentable fact that many do not know what is the mind or intention of

the Lord for their lives. How much they need for Him to open their eyes,

to see that everything that comes into their lives can be meaningful.

The Lord has not wasted even

one thing. To understand the Lord's purpose is to see very clearly that

He is aiming at a single objective: the breaking of the outward man.

However, too many, even

before the Lord raises a hand, are already upset. Oh, we must realize

that all the experiences, troubles and trials that the Lord sends us are

for our highest good! We cannot expect the Lord to give better

things,
for these are His best.

Should one approach the Lord
and pray, saying, "O Lord, please let me choose the best," I
believe He
would tell him, "What I have given you is the best; your daily
trials
are for your greatest profit."

So the motive behind all the
orderings of God is to break our outward man. Once this occurs
and the
spirit can come forth, we begin to be able to exercise our
spirit.

The Timing of Our Brokenness

The Lord employs two
different ways to break our outward man; one is gradual, the
other
sudden. To some, the Lord gives the sudden breaking followed
by a
gradual one. With others, the Lord arranges that they have
constant
daily trials, until one day He brings about large-scale
breaking.

If it is not the sudden first
and then the gradual, it is the gradual followed by the
sudden. It
would seem the Lord usually spends several years upon us
before He can
accomplish this work of breaking.

The timing is in His hands.
We cannot shorten the time, though we certainly can prolong
it. In some
lives the Lord is able to accomplish this work after a few

years of
dealing; in others it is evident that after 10 or 20 years the
work is
still unfinished.

This is most serious! Nothing
is more grievous than wasting God's time. How often the church
is
hindered! We can preach by using our mind; we can stir others
by using
our emotions, yet if we do not know how to use our spirit, the
Spirit of
God cannot touch people through us. The loss is great, should
we
needlessly prolong the time.

Therefore, if we have never
before wholly and intelligently consecrated ourselves to the
Lord, let
us do so now, saying: "Lord, for the future of the church, for
the
future of the gospel, for Your way, and also for my own life,
I offer
myself without condition, without reservation, into Your
hands. Lord, I
delight to offer myself to You and am willing to let You have
Your full
way through me."

And then let us prepare for the breaking of the box and the
releasing of the fragrance within.

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