



April 21, 2023

Spiritual Pain and Discomfort

Warm hellos friends, brethren, co-workers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

We have just recently finished the 2023 Feast Days of Unleavened Bread. I hope you have all had a meaningful celebration. There's the question that often comes up every year. Did you discover any leavened food that you had missed and had to throw out sometime during the 7 days of the Feast? Perhaps you found it after the days were complete?

I remember back in 2014 a visiting elder and his wife stayed in our home in North Carolina during our absence to help with the Passover service and Holy days as we were away from the U.S. serving the congregations we pastored in the country of Colombia. They relayed to us, "that a case of bottled pure water in our home, upon examination while drinking, contained sodium bicarbonate!" Yes, in water? Who would have thought? I asked them to not throw the water out, as it is not the days of unleavened water, but that's a subject we will discuss at some point in the future.

But what about leaven? There are so many stories that come to mind for me personally. I could fill pages if I mentioned them here. This year I did not find any physical leaven or leavened food during the days within our home. But, there is something that falls in the realm of malice and provocation that I would like to get rid of - the pain in my knees and lower back due to injury when I was younger, and subsequent surgeries. It results in inflammation of the joints – and it is very painful! The knees swell up and become inflamed from the inside out. Simple tasks like standing, or walking up and down stairs become increasingly difficult.

In our travels, especially to and from hotels and airports, carrying luggage is a chore! This is why I often sit down during and after a sermon message, and talk with brethren from a chair or at a table. Even long rides in our car or on airplanes remind me that these hidden challenges are still there!

More importantly though, there are conditions that can beset us spiritually and cause spiritual pain and discomfort.

We humans can give in to behaviors, words, and attitudes that can inflame and cause pain in our own lives and within our relationships. When anger builds up, that can lead to irrational acts and hurtful words that cause pain to others and ourselves that are not easily healed. What is that saying, "once you ring the bell, you can't un-ring it! Anger seems to be more often a problem with men. Women can also display hurtful anger. *"Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman."* (Proverbs 21:19) This could be applied the other way also. Anger and wrath are several "brands" of spiritual leavening that we are to remove. *"But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth."* (Colossians 3:8) When we perceive that unhealthy wrath and anger have made their appearance in our minds and emotions, we need to take action to keep them under check. *"Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath."* (Ephesians 4:26) The instruction encourages us to defuse the anger before we act on it and before it inflames us.

If I sense my knees are going to begin swelling, and intense pain is coming on, I can usually defuse it by taking a small amount of Ibuprofen. But if I don't heed the symptoms and let it get a foothold, then I will suffer for many days.

Our human condition with a Romans 8:7 nature makes us vulnerable to being provoked and inflamed. The apostle Paul wrote several letters to the congregation at Corinth. They had allowed pride and carnality to become embedded in the congregation and Paul likened it to leaven. *"Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are*

unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness . . ."(1 Corinthians 5:6-8) Paul asked them to search out the infectious malice and ill will and put it away.

Paul also wrote a second letter of encouragement and instruction. He warned the congregation of false apostles who sought to infect and stir up the congregation with the leavening of deception and false teaching. He was concerned that when he came personally to the congregation next time that he would find more carnal and hurtful behaviors. "*For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults*" (2 Corinthians 12:20). Paul concluded this multi-faceted letter with encouragement and good will. "*Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.*" (2 Corinthians 13:11)

The true source of healing is God's Holy Spirit and His Holy Word. May you and I continue to examine our lives daily, not just during the Days of Unleavened Bread, and continue to receive that special healing and not allow anger and contentions to cause injurious inflammation.

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.



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