

Accusing the Brethren

By Jamie Buckingham

Few things bring more terror to a small child than listening to his parents verbally abuse each other. Wise parents settle their personal disagreements behind closed doors rather than attack each other in front of their small children. When sides are drawn the child is caught in an untenable situation. Especially is this true when one or both parents draw the child into the argument, forcing him to take sides.

"If you love me you'll leave your father."
"Your mom is crazy. Don't pay any attention to her."

The child, however, loves both parents. He needs both parents. Even if the child has enough discernment to figure out one parent is right and the other wrong, how can he turn his back on someone he loves?

It is this situation in which many of us now find ourselves. For reasons known only to God, some popular Christian leaders have taken their disagreements to the public—the unbelieving public—and the children are confused.

When King Saul was caught in horrible sin and ended his life on his sword, a saddened King David warned his soldiers: "Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad..." (2 Sam. 1:20, NIV).

Oral Roberts' unique approach to fund raising became caustic fodder for the cannons of every columnist in the nation. Mike Royko of the *Chicago Tribune* said he was praying Roberts would die. Doonesbury began a countdown to Roberts' death date. None of them mentioned the cause for which Roberts was raising money: to provide free tuition so every graduate of the ORU medical school can spend at least four years as a medical missionary to Third World nations.

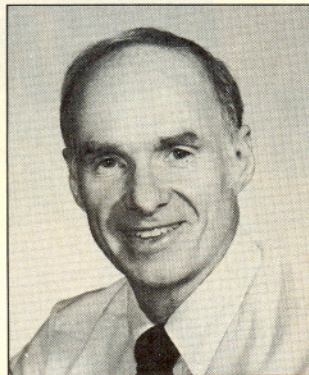
But we expected that from the public media.

Recently the *Washington Post*, in a front-page article, sneered at the fund-raising techniques used by John Meares in his Evangel Cathedral in Washington, D.C. The article quoted several "former members" who scoffed because Meares had encouraged his nearly all-black congregation to believe God for extra funds so they can build a new church building. Buried in the text was the purpose of the new building: to draw white members and work toward racial reconciliation. No reference was made that Meares, perhaps more than any other white man in America, has dedicated his life to bringing the gospel to inner-city blacks.

The world's media channels will never be fair.

However, when well-known Christian leaders use the airwaves—even if it's on "Christian" TV—to condemn other Christians, the children are confused.

One thing is sure: God is cleaning up His church. The Jim Bakker/Jimmy Swaggart/Marvin Gorman/Richard Dortch/John Ankerburg/Jerry Falwell debacle is vivid evidence. As the stories were breaking in late March God warned me to



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stay clear. "There are cracks at the bases of these modern towers which reach toward heaven," He said. "I am bringing them down." He went on to say He had "loosed the press," as He loosed the locust on the Israelites (see Joel 1:4), for justice begins at the house of God.

"God is lancing a boil," Oral Roberts told me during a visit with him in his prayer tower. "Let the matter seethe."

On my way home I prayed, "What should I do?"

I heard God say: "The locusts will devour the fields of the just and the unjust. Therefore, stand with your friends until the shaking is over. The glory of the Lord will be your rear

guard."

Recently I met with a group of longtime friends who gather annually to brainstorm issues and ideas. As always, our conversation drifted to a certain Christian community which some feel is heretical. As we talked I realized we had become a nest of negativism. "We never say anything good about these people," I blurted. "All we do is talk about them behind their backs."

The room became strangely silent. I felt bad, but we had fallen into the trap of the enemy. Satan is the "accuser of the brethren." When we join that chorus we're playing on the wrong team. We wound up repenting and praying for our brothers.

What should we do when we cannot tolerate a brother's method?

Matthew 18 outlines the procedure. Jesus says disagreements between brothers should be handled with face-to-face confrontation "just between the two of you." If that does not settle the matter, take along an arbitrator. If the problem remains, it should come before the elders or a presbytery. (The Bible says "tell it to the church." The term *ekklesia* refers to a small group of officials who represent the body.) At no place does He say, "Call a press conference."

Jesus equates lack of agreement with "binding" and agreement with "loosing." Disagreements spring from a controlling spirit, one that demands others agree with our lifestyle, our doctrine, our interpretation of the Bible. The controlling spirit binds, while the Spirit of Jesus looses. Jesus says that if two on earth agree "it will be done for you by God. For where two or three *come together* in my name, there am I with them" (Matt. 18:19)

"Come together" refers to men who were once in disagreement but have worked through their problems using His procedure, have laid down their right to be right, and have started treating each other as brothers.

There are those of us willing to form a presbytery and mediate such a meeting—even now—between these disagreeing brethren. Perhaps, then, the locusts will go home and the children will sleep well at night. ■