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## Rulers or Feeders?

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If any of us were asked, "What do you prefer, rulers or feeders?" Most of us would say, "Give us feeders." But so often when we are given the choice between those who are rulers and those who are feeders, we choose the rulers. Why? Whatever the reason, it seems to be a human tendency.

We could point out a few characteristics of the rulers, such as the following. The rulers are the stronger ones; they're the organizing ones; they are the authoritative ones; they are the judges and the punishers. They often come into the place of power subtly, serving with the feeders, then taking over after the feeders are gone. How do we recognize them? There are ways they can be recognized, because the differences are great. However, the more difficult part is to acknowledge them and to admit to ourselves that they are what they are. So often the rulers who come into that place by serving at the side of the feeders, fall into a place of honor, or usurp such a place of honor among the people, that the people, even though they recognize that these are not the same as the feeders were, they cannot acknowledge that they are really rulers and not feeders.

When Jesus sent His disciples out, He sent them out to heal and to feed. Luke 9 brings this out very clearly. He gave them power over unclean spirits and to heal all diseases, and He showed them how to give bread to people. This is the power that He gave them and really the only power.

In this same chapter, He took away from them three powers: financial power, power of government, or political, and the power to destroy. These are some of the differences between the rulers and feeders, and they are truly great. One could wonder why would we ever confuse them as the differences are so vast. It seems that we have no trouble recognizing and acknowledging the rulers in the other fellow's church, but we're very loath to acknowledge it in our own.

In Judges 9, we have another very true picture of the difference between them. The trees wanted a ruler over them. There are people who want to be ruled, and there are people who want to rule, and eventually they'll come together. The people choose their ruler, and the ruler in time often becomes a despot, and exercises cruelty over the people. Anyway, the trees went first to the olive tree and the olive tree refused to be their king. Then they went to the fig tree, and it refused to be their king. Then they went to the vine, and it refused, also. These were all

three feeders, and they were not interested in ruling. They loved the privilege of having food for others, and rejoiced in this.

So the poor trees in their desire for a ruler went to the bramble. The bramble told them if they wanted him to rule over them, they would have to trust in his shadow, and if not, then let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon. How much shade is there under a bramble? How close to the ground do you have to get to be under it? How much liberty do you have under it? How far can you move without feeling its sting? There are things the feeders have that the bramble doesn't have, and vice versa. The feeder had food, something for God and man; the bramble had none. The feeder had comfortable shade; the bramble didn't. The bramble had thorns; the feeders didn't. The bramble had a zeal that reached out to destroy better than itself. The feeders had a healthful influence -- wine and oil -- that could be carried far beyond the place where it stood. We can be assured of this, that the Lord may come as an olive tree, a fig tree, a vine, or as in the Song of Solomon, an apple tree, but He'll never, never, never come as a bramble.

The first three were not the least interested in promotion; they just wanted to be feeders and healers. This was one of the temptations thrown at Jesus by Satan, promotion. When the people wanted to make Him king, promotion. He would have had to forsake all the goodness and sweetness and the fatness of the kingdom of Heaven, to accept this promotion. Yet men still love promotion, and accept it in the name of the One who was the greatest rejector of promotion there ever was. They still rule over others in the name of the One Who was the greatest feeder ever.

People can complain about their lot under a ruler, but seldom want to change. They will also resist any effort of anyone to deliver them from such servitude, and they will defend even as far as destroying their own loved ones, the rights of their rulers to rule. This is a fact brought out many times in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Three cases come to mind regarding this. Gideon, Samson, and Jesus Himself. When Gideon tore down the altar of Baal, the god of the Midianites, the people of the city, his own brethren, were ready to destroy him for resisting their rulers. Samson's brethren were ready to destroy him for resisting the Philistines, their rulers. Both of these men were being moved by God toward the deliverance of the very people that wanted to destroy them. And Jesus, the greatest deliverer there ever was, suffered the greatest rejection ever, by the people He came to deliver. The people asked in John 7:48 "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" This seems so ridiculous, were not they able to see for themselves, think for themselves, and choose for themselves? Not really, and the masses of people never have been able to. They have always preferred that someone else do these things for them.

Why do we need rulers? We don't. Why do we choose them? Because we think we need them. Why do we think this? Because they, the rulers, have taught us this. What we need is feeders, and rulers are not feeders and never will be. But the feeders will be rulers, but of a different kind. The kind that we read of in Hebrews 13 that shepherd and care for the sheep. These are the kind that we will be able and willing to follow and obey, because they follow the Shepherd.

What does it take to escape from the snare of the rulers? Three things come to mind.

Recognition, acknowledgment, and courage. But none of these things are possible without a genuine love for the Good Shepherd. Without this love for Him, we won't see the difference between His feeders and the rulers, even as vast that the difference is. With this love, we can recognize it, so we can acknowledge it, or admit to ourselves, and this love will give us the courage to face all opposition, even though we may have to do so alone.

In II Cor. 11 we see some more marks of the rulers. Verse 3...they depart from the simplicity that is in Christ. Verse 4...they preach another Jesus, one of law instead of one of Grace. They impart another spirit and teach another gospel. Verse 5...they are recognized as chief apostles. (In one version it says thus: I was not a whit behind those great apostles.

Those that they the people esteemed to be great.) Verse 20 ... they bring into bondage, they devour, they take, they exalt themselves, and they smite on the face. Yet we suffer or tolerate them. Why? Because we can't bring ourselves to acknowledge that they are what they are. In connection with this we might mention II Cor. 7:2 some marks of the feeders, or the true apostles. "Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man." Quite a testimony and one that the rulers cannot truthfully claim. They claim it, but not truthfully, because they wrong, corrupt, and defraud. The greatest fraud being as Jesus told the Pharisees in Matthew 23 ... they shut up the kingdom of God, etc. And they do this by not teaching the grace of God in truth.

Another thing about rulers is that they have their favorites. They will favor them who love them, and support them, and will despise and persecute them who don't love them, and don't support them. Those who once gave them support and afterwards retracted it are slandered and accused of having a wrong spirit. They tolerate no opposition and will go to great extremes to stop the mouth of the opposition. The degree of the extent that this is carried is determined by the degree of departure of the church from its original form. In the early days in church history, the persecution would have been slander and rejection by the group, and gossip, etc. Later, as the departure reached a greater degree, it came to dungeons, torture chambers, and chopping blocks, all to the same end of stopping the voice of the dissenter, and all justified in the name of Christ. It is the same seed and the same soil, the only difference is time.

It is nice to envision the church under the guidance of feeders. These will be good trees bearing good fruit and bringing gladness to the hearts of men and of God. The people will be individually taught of God, as they will be fed and nourished well and will grow in grace and in the knowledge of God and His Son. They will love one another and thereby hold up the standard, the only standard that Jesus gave whereby His people would be known by the world as such.

Another mark of rulers is that they rule by law. Without law, they are nothing and have no power. They rule by decree through fear, leading people to believe that to disobey them is loss of salvation. They tell us that the ten commandments are still in force, and that to disobey them is sin. They tell us that there are problems today that didn't exist in Bible days, so they have the right to make laws covering such things. We see all these things and accept their ruling, refusing to acknowledge that it is a perversion and a departure from Truth.

The feeder feeds by life and spirit, bringing forth fruit that feeds the heart of the hungry of soul.

There's no laws governing the apple tree; anyone can pick and eat of the sweetness of its fruit and rejoice in its shadow. There is no fence around it, keeping certain people out, and certain people in. There is no chain tying people to the trunk, not even a line on the ground telling them how far they can go. Where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty.

Let us value more and more the liberty wherein Christ has made us free, and understand and avoid the yoke of bondage.

By Jim Wood