

## “Interference”

Some of us are always thinking – we could have done things and gone places – if only ... someone hadn't been in our way – frustrating us – meddling – and opposing and generally interfering – so, “who's stopping you?” Well, I'll just tell you – “if the foreman on the job didn't have it in for me,” or “if my parents weren't such old fogies, so stuck in the mud,” or “if we only had decent neighbors on our block,” or “if I'd just had a better math teacher,” or “if it weren't for the government,” ohhh, the government!, or “if my business didn't hog-tie me 24 hours a day,” or “if I didn't always have the children on my coat-tails,” or “if the whole world were different” – “indeed if it weren't for all this obstruction on the part of everything and everybody, I would go places and do things in this world and be somebody. Why I might even act like a Christian – if things were different. But ... seeing as how ...”

It's an old, old story, isn't it? Indeed, Adam did wish to God one day he had died with all his ribs in place. Everything would have been so perfect, he whimpered to God in the garden, if it hadn't been for (quote) “that woman thou gavest to be with me,” i.e.: if heaven hadn't made such a dreadful mistake in picking Eve out for him, it would have been an entirely different story – etc., etc., and etc.

In like manner, in the Old Testament, if Abel hadn't kept on, and kept on, and kept on meddling with Cain, Cain never would have had to kill him to get ahead, would he?, or so he said. “Am I my brother's keeper?” For Cain, looking after his family was “like being keeper in a zoo” – family were a drag on him, always stopping him from doing what he wanted to do. So he killed the opposition – just like that! Crack! You read about it in the paper every other day, now don't you?

And then you remember young Lot. His old uncle, Abraham, a God-fearing mountain man, was forever blocking Lot's self-expression, so off Lot goes “galavanting” (sashaying) down the Primrose path to the green plains of Sodom (that's right – next door to “G”) so he can have a happy hour and “be himself” for a change. Similarly, Esau, feeling fenced in by his old-fashioned daddy, skips out one night, evades the sheriff, crosses the county line, and marries a “uh-um” Hittite. Likewise, you recall, little Joseph, the brain, somehow gets in the way of all those big brawny brothers of his, and there being no military school handy to send him off to, they sell him to slavers. Later on, a lot later on, a mere adolescent named David makes a middle-

aged Saul feel insecure and David gets a javelin thrown at his heart. Then David himself grows up and says if it just weren't for Uriah stopping him – why he could have his heart's desire, and you know what her name was and how the tale ends.

And so on through Old Testament history, with a skip and a jump, all the way to the New Testament, where the entrenched leadership thought Jesus was a young upstart opposing them, and you recall what they did to him ...

Thus, as we said, from the beginning, people have been shouting at their relatives and at all in sundry: "Get outta my way! I want to go places and do things, but you're blocking the path! Step aside, please! Stop bugging me! It's my life!"

Now, in the first place, there are times when once you take a good honest look at who's interfering with you, you are fully justified, you have not only the right but the duty to say politely, "Mind your own business – please," and then quietly, and with as much grace as you can muster, go your own way. Jesus had to push aside well-meaning family, well-meaning friends, and well-meaning Pharisees in order to "set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem." If he had allowed their pride and prejudice to interfere, there never would have been a gospel, and the Gospel would never have been preached if the disciples had not learned to break right through the out-worn traditions dead set against them. And if the Apostle Paul had not learned how to ignore, out-wit, "out-smart," out-maneuver and leave far behind a whole host of persons who were firmly convinced he was deluded, you and I would not be Christians today. And so he says to Tim: "You better do the same."

There are some people you simply cannot allow to have their way over you. Their continued meddling is not for your good – nor for theirs. If their attitudes and ways would dominate you and stunt your growth in Christian maturity, you may have to say, "I will no longer allow you to interfere; from now on, honey, I will think my own thoughts, express them as I want, and make my own decisions; I just hope you'll understand, ole buddy." Like Paul, if you honestly feel, in your heart of hearts, that you are right in the sight of God, then go right ahead. You and I, as Christians, are no man's (and no woman's) slave, remember that. Therefore, (to alter St. Augustine just a little) "love God and go your best way – unafraid." This doesn't mean there won't be somebody trying to stop you, it may break your heart or get you killed, but if you stand for the truth, at least your soul is free – and free from bitterness. You no longer hate those

who would hamper you, or hem you in – it's just that every day you out-think, out-believe, out-live them, the whole crew of them, this is a part of what Christ meant by "love your enemies." Summary of point one: look hard at who's stopping you and you may discover it's unhealthy – you'll have to overcome it, if you can.

And there is a second side to this problem.

Sometimes, our feeling that we are constantly being blocked by somebody is altogether imaginary. Look hard at who's holding you back, and you'll discover – lo, and behold! – there isn't anyone in your way. Could be ... that's just an excuse we have made up to justify our sloth (we didn't have enough energy to go anywhere in the first place), or our stupidity (enough sense), or our sin (enough character). (*The Probiest* "there is a line in the street – I will not go out!") Young Eve never was in old Adam's way; he was his own worst interference. He should have had enough sense not to blame God and his wife; it only made the big dummy look even dumber, as all men look when they blame God and some woman, including "mommee."

Or, like Saul, there are those who thoroughly enjoy imagining they have an enemy in the way. This always gives empty-headed people something to think about: "Let's see now, who has it in for me? Who's persecuting poor-little-me today? So I mustn't forget to hate the following .." These are the puerile persons who will invent a family problem, start a fracas for the fun of it. This sort may make a fine situation comedy on T.V. but they are not exactly heaven to live with! People who manufacture enemies are, like Saul, to be watched. They'll get you.

So, a great deal of the time, when you and I say someone else is blocking our best interest, the truth is, we've made this up, and we are just too lazy, too timid, too stupid, or lack the moral stamina to amount to anything anyway.

Someone needs to look us steady in the eye and say: "No one's stopping you, old boy; stop imagining other people have it in for you. Nobody, but nobody, is holding you back. You are in your own way. Sorry, but you are holding yourself back. You've drawn the circle of your own life small. You've narrowed yourself down to exactly nothing. So wake up, baby bunting, before it's all over and you're in the cradle for good – the cradle of the grave."

There is, however, as you would expect, a third point to be made here (never pack your purse to leave a Presbyterian Church until you hear the 3<sup>rd</sup> point) – o.k., start packing, here's the 3<sup>rd</sup> point coming up... There are times when being blocked in this life, far from being imaginary, is absolutely necessary. Young Lot would have been a lot happier if his old uncle

Abraham had succeeded in giving him a few inhibitions here and there. By the by, there is nothing wrong with an occasional inhibition (the completely uninhibited person is a total wreck). And Esau could have used a little suppression or two – a little suppression is a very good thing. Not re-pression (pretending you don't have all those feelings) – “I've got 'em, but I've got 'em under control!”

Morals do block the old criminal in us – praise God for that. Fear of rules and regulations, dislike of all authority, is running smack into trouble. A false notion of freedom is creating individuals the society cannot handle. When disobedience, civil or uncivil, becomes a virtue, there's a screw loose somewhere that is necessary to hold us up and hold us together.

For example, parents who haven't the sense or the courage to intervene, who are afraid to say, “No – and here's the reason why – and you better stick by it or else” are much more likely to produce chaotic children than those parents who can discipline-in-love. “No” is still a perfectly good two-letter word and an honest spanking is not child abuse – it seldom injures a little psyche.

And while we're on the subject, who said just because we're 30 or 50, we can call the commandments fudge? Don't fool yourself. Children are quick to recognize the falseness of a double-standard at home: one for 15, another for 50. Don't try it.

At every age, morals were made to meddle – to interfere with our destructive, our daemonic bent – and it's very good meddling. There is more than one tendency in us that needs to be stopped short – if we are to keep our humanity, our sanity.

To recapitulate: Take a hard, honest look at who's stopping you from what – and you may discover it is –

- 1.) Unhealthy – and ought to be overcome.
- 2.) Or you may discover it is altogether imaginary – and ought to be forgotten.
- 3.) You may realize it is necessary and ought to be obeyed.

As to how to tell the difference, you'll just have to use what sense you do have – and call on more than a bit of the Holy Spirit. “That's all!”

Let us pray – we need to:

“O Lord, we are so often lacking in plain ordinary judgement. We make up enemies we don't have. We run from foes we ought to face, and fight what we ought to accept with joy. Good Lord, give us some uncommon good sense to live the good life. For Christ's sake.”

“And now unto him who is able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before his presence with exceeding joy – unto the only wise God our Saviour – be glory and majesty, dominion and power.

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