



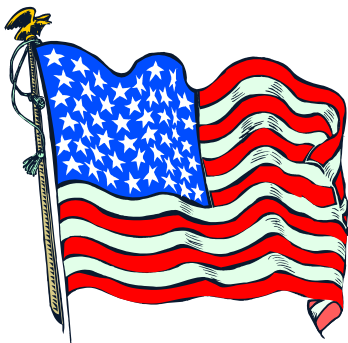
Is Unrestricted Loyalty a Virtue?

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

“To our Country! In her intercourse with foreign nations, may she always be in the right, but our country, right or wrong” — a famous toast by Commodore Stephen Decatur.

Loyalty to and support of one’s country, friends, family, or brethren can be a noble thing. In fact, there is far too little of it in our “me first” society. It is a wonderful feeling to have someone who will stick with you through thick and thin. One that you can count on being there in hard times as well as good. Over the years, I have been blessed with family, friends, and brethren who have demonstrated such loyalty. For this I am eternally grateful.

However, to the Christian, loyalty to any person or institution on earth must have its limitations. Jesus made that crystal clear when he said, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:37).



If there is anything that I have learned in almost fifty years of preaching, it is that people, institutions, and even congregations change. I have also learned that some people are going to be loyal to certain people, schools, papers, and congregations — no matter what. They will stand by and support them no matter what they may be teaching or doing. It is “to my (people, school, paper or congregation) . . . may (they) always be right, but my (people, school, paper or congregation), right or wrong.”

In the early years of my preaching, I witnessed my alma mater become more and more liberal. It was not long until I had to face reality — we had little in common any more. I saw the content of “old reliable” (*Gospel Advocate*) become slanted more and more in favor of church supported human institutions without allowing any opposing views to appear on its pages. I vividly remember the “quarantine.” I saw congregation after congregation depart from the “old paths.” I saw preacher see “*Unrestricted Loyalty*” on p. 536

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“Why We Still Need Heresy Trials”

Mike Willis

Recent conflicts in the denominations over the appointment of practicing homosexuals or those who defend the appointment of practicing homosexuals to positions of leadership are briefly noted in the newspapers on a regular basis. Asserting that an evangelical renewal is occurring in mainline Protestant denominations, Michael S. Hamilton and Jennifer McKinney observed, “More than any other issue, the never-say-die efforts of liberals to normalize homosexuality have galvanized grassroots support for the political campaigns of the evangelical renewal” (“Turning the Mainline Around,” *Christianity Today* [August 2003], 37).

The bonds of fellowship are strained within these denominational communities. Other issues besides homosexuality which are equally important are on the table, including the duration of the punishment of hell. Some denominational preachers are strained to the point that they are ready to break fellowship with their denomination because their denomination receives into its fellowship those who teach many doctrines that formerly were identified and rejected as heresy.

Some denominational leaders are reacting to the pluralism, ecumenism, and tolerance of those teaching error by saying that there need to be some heresy trials are needed in the twenty-first century. The title of this editorial was taken from the subtitle of a recent article in *Christianity Today*. That article, “Tangling With Wolves,” was written by Chris Armstrong, managing editor of *Christian History* magazine, and appeared in the August 2003 issue (50-51). Armstrong concluded his article with these pungent paragraphs:

The problem is that the preached word has power — one way or the other. Every Sunday, unsuspecting people enter churches shepherded by those whose theological openness leads them to teach things we used to call heresies. What they hear in such teaching is not just divergent opinion. It is potent misdirection, capable of turning the sheep away from salvation.

And this is the nub. As a teacher of mine once put it, if Jack the Ripper is abroad in your town, killing people and mutilating their bodies, the city’s leaders must track him down and render him unable to inflict further harm. And if, as the historic church has always — until today — agreed, a person

see “Heresy Trials” on p. 536



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“Deliver Such an One to Satan”

Connie W. Adams

The church at Corinth had a problem. Evidently, they did not regard it as such, for they had done nothing about it, and there was a sense of arrogance and support for a brother who was engaged in immoral conduct. 1 Corinthians 5 gives inspired instruction as to what to do about this matter. The future standing of that church before God was at stake. In view of the fact that similar situations arise among churches with varying reactions (if any), it is to our present advantage to consider the problem and the divinely prescribed solution.

THE SITUATION AT CORINTH

“It is commonly reported that there is fornication among you” (v. 1). This was not just a matter of idle gossip. The evidence was clear and well known. The instruction of this passage would not have been given based purely on hearsay. Not only did fornication exist, but it involved a case of incest wherein “one should have his father’s wife.” This was not to be passed over as simply a case of shifting social mores. It was not a sickness nor an “alternate lifestyle.” It was fornication. It was sinful. It was shameful before God. Verse 2 reveals that the brethren were swelled with pride and there had been no mourning or sorrow over this.

THE PRESCRIBED REMEDY

Paul said he had “judged already . . . concerning him that hath so done this deed” (v. 3). The apostles were to sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). The apostles delivered divine judgment, or teaching, designed for all of God’s holy nation, which now is spiritual Israel, the church. Paul was not just handing out good advice. This was divine judgment directed by the Holy Spirit.

The *action* to be taken was public. The sin was publicly known. They were to take the action required “when ye are gathered together” (v. 4). What was to be done when they were gathered together? Paul said “to deliver such an one unto Satan” (v. 5). He did not tell them to do something which he did not practice. He said of Hymenaeus and Alexander, “whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:20). Whatever this phrase meant, Paul practiced it and urged it upon the church at Corinth.

What is meant by “deliver such an one unto Satan”? Other expressions in the context help to explain it. Verse 2 says “that he that hath done this deed

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might be taken away from among you.” Something was to be done which would isolate this brother so that he would not be considered “among them.” In verse 7 he said, “Purge out therefore the old leaven.” This was an evil influence with the potential of spreading as leaven to contaminate “the whole lump” (v. 6). They could not afford to ignore it. The safety and well-being of the whole congregation was at stake. Sin, harbored, defended, or tolerated has an evil effect on others in the congregation. Would to God that all might understand this.

Paul further explained what it means to “deliver such an one unto Satan” when he said “not to keep company . . . with such an one, no, not to eat” (v. 11). They could not regulate the world at large, but they could, as a congregation and in their social dealings with each other, avoid such individuals. No equality was to be granted to him in the social circle. Such would have indicated approval or tolerance of the sinful conduct. This was called “judging them that are within” (v. 12). Then, in verse 13, Paul closed this section by saying, “Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (v. 13).

It was called delivering him to Satan because the brethren cut him off from them. The brother had made a choice which was incompatible with righteousness, a choice which gratified the flesh and honored Satan rather than God. By putting him away from among them, purging him out, keeping no company with him, they simply recognized his choice and turned him over to it, with all its frightful consequences. He could not serve Satan and receive their hand in fellowship.

Other passages bearing on the subject indicate that such public denouncement and putting away should be prefaced by prayerful and careful effort to show the brother (or sister) the terrible nature of sin and what it does to the soul. In the matter of personal offenses, our Lord taught that the one wronged should try to bring the guilty to repentance. That failing, then the influence of others as witnesses should be enlisted. Should that fail, then the matter should be made known to the church. If repentance is still not forthcoming, then “let him be unto you as an heathen man and a publican” (Matt. 18:15-17). This accords with Galatians 6:1: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Brethren who fall into sin are to be meekly approached and every righteous effort exhausted *before* it becomes necessary to “deliver such an one unto Satan.” This rules out hasty, vindictive action. Don’t wait until you have accumulated a long list of apostates, then after some teaching on the subject read a long list of names, or simply delete their names from the next directory of members. Some good that will do! No, brethren, first do everything possible to bring about repentance. But when righteous efforts fail, then the

action of 1 Corinthians 5 becomes necessary.

WHY?

Some rationalize that this will do no good. That is not our business. This very attitudes smacks of unbelief. The first reason this must be done is because *the Lord said so*. Why be baptized? The Lord said so. Why eat the Lord’s supper? The Lord commanded it. Why “deliver such an one unto Satan”? Because the Lord said so. But won’t that “run him off”? No, no, my brethren. He is *already* “off.” His sins have separated him from his God. God does not sanction his action and neither should we. The public action of the church recognizes where he is spiritually. He has chosen Satan. He is not penitent. Good and faithful brethren do not drive him into serving the flesh. But sadly, the time comes when we have to face reality and turn such an one over to his own choice. Faithful brethren also have a choice. If they choose to please God, then they must repudiate such conduct on the part of those who have enjoyed with them the sweet and sacred fellowship of the saints of God.

Our passage shows that this action is calculated to bring about “*the destruction of the flesh*” to the end that “the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (v. 5). This action is strong medicine. It is meant to shake and awaken the erring so that he brings his passion under control thus bringing about the “destruction of the flesh.” If this occurs, the ultimate good will be his final salvation at the coming of the Lord. I firmly believe that the knowledge that my brethren were about to cut me off from their hallowed and revered associations would do more to bring me to my knees than anything I can imagine. How could one who ever cherished the blessedness of walking in the light, of tasting the heavenly gift, and the uplifting influences of those of “like precious faith” ever be the same again when this is withheld? If there is any faint recollection or fond memory savored of those grand and glorious days when this brother once stood tall and unashamed among the people of God, should not this severe measure bring shame and grief to his spirit which, in turn, will spark genuine repentance?

Such action must be taken *for the good of the church*. Paul said, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” It is a painful decision to amputate a finger, an arm, or a leg. It would never even be considered were it not essential to save life. Likewise, such uncorrected spiritual disease as prevailed at Corinth is an affront to the sensitivities of every faithful child of God. It cannot be endured. It must be corrected, or else the serious measures of this passage must be applied.

A HAPPY ENDING

It is apparent from 2 Corinthians that this action had the desired effect. 2 Corinthians 2:1-11 calls upon the brethren to forgive the repenting brother lest he be burdened with “overmuch sorrow.” “Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that

Using the Bible Like a Club

I was asked “why some members of the church have a tendency to use the Bible as a ‘club’ (as in something to hit one over the head with), instead of a ‘teaching tool.’ I have some ideas about this topic for a sermon but would like some help in dealing with this subject.”

REPLY:

First, are those who make this charge guilty of using their complaint as a club and not a teaching tool? Are they attempting to teach those whom they think are misusing the Bible as a club, or are they using their complaint as a club to beat them over the head?

Second, (1) was the Hebrew writer guilty of using the Bible as a “club” to “hit one over the head” (Heb. 3:7-4:11; 7:1-28; 9:1-12:2)? (2) Was Paul doing the same in Romans 9-11 (observe his many quotes from the OT to show the Jews the error of their false concepts of the nature of God’s plan of making men righteous)? See also his speeches in Acts 13:16-39; 17:2, 3, 22-31. Demetrius and almost the whole city of Ephesus evidently thought Paul had assaulted them with a “club” (Acts 19:23-29). Were those sermons “clubs” and not “teaching tools”? (3) Did Peter use the Bible as a club in Acts 2 when he cited numerous Scriptures to show the Jews that Jesus is Lord and Christ? (4) Did Jesus use the Scriptures like a “club” in Matthew 22:23-46 and John 8:13-18?

contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow” (vv. 6-7). This is a clear reference to the action of 1 Corinthians 5 which was “inflicted of many.” The brother had repented. Their action did not drive him away, it brought him back.

Like Corinth, there are congregations which need some house-cleaning. Such would put sin in its proper light, manifest indignation of the faithful against it, and serve notice to the world around that ungodly behavior among Christians is not approved, and would help save the souls of those who are caught in the snare of the Devil.

If the answer to the questions above is, “no,” then one must show how brethren today use the Bible in a way that differs from how the Lord and the apostles used it. If it cannot be shown, if documented evidence cannot be produced which distinguishes between the Lord’s use of the Bible and the way we use it today, it follows that one of two things is true: either the apostles were “guilty” of using the Bible as a “club” and not a “teaching tool,” or neither they nor we are guilty of the charge. If a verifiable example of the difference between how brethren and the apostles use the word of God to assail error cannot be produced, then it follows that either both are guilty of misusing the word of God or neither are guilty, and the charge is false. (For a detailed study of this complaint see, *The Christ, The Cross, and the Church* 144-234. You may obtain a copy by calling (800) 428-0121.)

Third, anyone who uses the Bible like a “club” is probably guilty of using an instrument that is too soft to do the job. Scripture indicates that the Bible should be used as a hammer (most likely a sledge hammer, since it is used to break rocks, Jer. 23:29). The Bible is to be powerful enough to hew (chop, slice) and kill opponents (Hos. 6:5). In this regard, it is sharper than any two edged sword; hence, much more devastating and destructive than a mere “club.” The word of God, as a weapon of mass destruction, is to be large and strong enough to cast down fortresses of error, to batter down their walls (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Also attached to this weapon, the Bible, is a fire-like flame thrower, an instrument designed to burn enemy soldiers (Jer. 23:29). Obviously, therefore, a “club” alone is not sufficient to do the work.

I believe it is said that the captain of our salvation uses this weapon as a sharp, two-edged sword with which to “destroy” and consume his adversaries (2 Thess. 2:7; Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16; cf. Heb. 4:12; 2 Cor. 13:2, 10).

It is quite apparent, therefore, that all who have been using the Bible as a simple “club” need to repent and use it as the weapon of God’s warfare. It is much more deadly and effective that way.

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“If Thy Right Eye Offend Thee . . .”

Jim McDonald

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell (Matt. 5:29-30).

These words are connected with Jesus’ statement “whoso looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery already with her in his heart.” (Refer to the previous article.) His instructions about our “right hand” and “right eye” are related to his conclusions about “lust.”

We must understand that Jesus did not have reference to literally cutting off our “right hand” or plucking out our “right eye.” One could do either of these (or both) but it would not solve the problem of lust. To do that would be equal to the “tail wagging the dog.” Our eyes and our hands are but our servants. “We” control them, not they us. True, Jesus said, “The lamp of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matt. 6:22). He tells us that just as we walk or stumble, dependent upon our physical vision, we walk or stumble according to our “spiritual” vision. Of some it is said, “He sees what he wants to see.” Our eyes behold the whole area of vision, but we may, through our mind, be focused only on one, blurring out the rest.

Our “right” eye and “right” hand stand for things most useful and dear to us. All recognize the meaning when one says of another, “He’s my ‘right hand man.’” To those of us who are “lefties,” we understand him to say, “If thy left hand cause thee to stumble” or “if thy left eye offend thee” pluck it out. “Lefties” use their right hand but only in a secondary role. It is useful, and I am grateful for it, but what would I do if I lost my left hand? Greatly impaired, I

assure you! This truth is tenderly illustrated in the life of the patriarch Jacob and his beloved wife, Rachel. He labored seven years for her and those years seemed unto him but a few days for the love he had for her (Gen. 29:2). Rachel bore Jacob two sons (Joseph and Benjamin), and she died giving birth to Benjamin. When her son was shown to her before she died, she named him “Benoni” which means “Son of my sorrow” but Jacob changed his name to “Benjamin” which means “Son of the right hand” (Gen. 35:18). The love of his life was gone.

Thus, to keep ourselves from lust that will condemn us in the sight of God, we must be willing to cast from us the dearest and most treasured desires and possessions we have. Longing for companionship, home, and hearth is one of our greatest needs and desires. Yet, some have ignored God’s love regarding this institution called “marriage” and have placed their very soul in jeopardy with God. To avoid this, Jesus said: “All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs which were so born from their mother’s womb; and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it” (Matt. 19:12). Those who have made themselves “eunuchs” (i.e., remained single) for the kingdom of heaven’s sake, have plucked out their “right eye” and cut off their “right hand.”

Every person lives in one of two tents: conTENT or disconTENT. In which do you live?

The Danger of Splintering

From childhood most of us have experienced that prickly point of a splinter, whether resulting from work, play, or casual activity. Oh, how it does hurt, both upon entry and during removal! The splinter considered here — even more hurtful and damaging — is that which separates from an established congregation when members, for a variety of reasons, decide to remove themselves to form another group.

Legitimate efforts to form new congregations, based upon a need necessitated by numerical growth or unscriptural collective activities requiring the violation of conscience, are not the splinter groups that we here condemn. Such unauthorized groups remove themselves when there is unrighteous pressure or ungodly influence exerted from within or without. The contributing influence might take the form of some novel idea, a charismatic leader, or opposition to established practices (“traditions” is the current term), or a combination of the previously named influences.

It is a pity that the faith of many is so shallow and their convictions so superficial that almost any new thing can catch their imagination and excite their fancy, thus becoming the focal point for a splinter group. That novel idea is sometimes a never-before-heard theory on divorce and remarriage, a new approach to the eating of the Lord’s supper, an untried effort to reach the lost, the desire to fraternize with the denominations, or — you name it. If the people favoring the “new thing” think their preference will never “fly” in their local church, they “fly the coop” so they can believe or practice what they wish. The terminating of congregational ties, the financial impairment of the church’s ability to function effectively, the hurt inflicted on existing relationships, the loss of influence in the community where they labor for the Lord, and the myriad of other consequences — all negative — never deter the splinter driver. In his self-interest and self-adulation he drives away so that he can achieve his personal goal, for selfish ambition is the fuel that moves this splinter driver. He is the “new Athenian,” somewhat like the old Athenians:

And they took hold of him, and brought him unto the Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new teaching

is, which is spoken by thee? Thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (Now all the Athenians and the strangers sojourning there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.) (Acts 17:19-21, ASV.)

A charismatic leader, blessed with speaking skills or just the “gift of gab,” can sway the uninformed and the immature. Emotional ties or the power to organize and get things done never hurt in the advancement of such a cause. Many a congregation has been fractured and another one put on its feet to limp along when such a leader seized a novel idea and effectively promoted it in an atmosphere where opinion surpassed faith and emotions outweighed truth. The only person deserving such esteem and credence is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Paul said that he is God’s gift to the church to be head over all things (Eph. 1:22-23). In all things he deserves the preeminence — first place or first rank (Col. 1:18). No human is worthy of such standing in any local church, neither in the time of the debacle at Corinth over human leaders or in our day. Paul urged the Corinthian saints not to think of men (or even to think) above (beyond) what is written in 1 Corinthians 4:6.

Opposition to established means of operating, frequently called traditions, is often the justification used to oppose the old and to advance the new. Traditions have become acceptable, not because they are the sole means of executing the Lord’s will, but because they provide effective and practical ways of obedience to God. Many have cited “our traditions” as their objection and cause for their destructive work. Let it be noted that the Bible never sanctions or condemns anything on the basis of its being old or new, especially expediences (helpful means or methods of doing the Lord’s work). Matters of faith were often upheld as being in harmony with the Lord’s will, and other matters were condemned because they lack the Lord’s backing (Col. 3:17). Matters of expediency (keeping of vows and circumcision) were practiced by Paul, even after the Law of Moses, which had bound them upon Jews as necessary, had lapsed in the divine administration. In fact, one would be hard pressed to find an instance where the Lord or his apostles ever opposed a harmless human tradition. In spite

of the divine attitude here affirmed toward such, it seems that some are bent upon such opposition; they seem to enjoy the label of “iconoclast.” So much disparaging talk about “our traditions” in recent years has usually been founded on the shaky foundation of misunderstanding/disbelief of the Scriptures; the talkers don’t know enough to even talk about the matter or they don’t care enough about the harm they leave in their wake. Divine traditions are never subject to human change (2 Thess. 2:15), whereas human traditions can and often do change as new situations and circumstances make them obsolete. Those traditions originating with man need to change when they cause us to set aside the way of the Lord (Mark 7:9, 13). What such novices little understand is that after a week or two they will have established their own traditions, which they must then oppose if they maintain their present attitude.

The weak and juvenile status of one’s faith is displayed when he contends to break down a tradition such as a formal dress code for worship. In the first place, no situation known to this writer has such a code, not even an understood one. Some might generally practice more “dressing up” than others, but none enforces such a practice. The use of such justification amounts to subterfuge; it is a cover for something else that the person has in mind. Some other agenda (some new thing in teaching or practice) is the real driving force behind such efforts. In a county with nearly fifty congregations, surely the person could find one where the people dress more to his liking without having to start a splinter group. Congregations based upon such a flimsy spiritual base cannot long endure or prosper in the Lord.

Another justification recently used fits into the same category — the desire to try another approach in reaching the lost that seemed not to produce results in the old environment. In the church-saturated environment just described, how likely is it that some new approach, tried after separation from an existing church and formation of another church, will succeed? Astute observers will quickly question the motivation of the new group, which could not seem to “get along” with their former associates.

Another tradition which some have sought to eliminate is the “pinch and sip” observance of the Lord’s supper. Even one of them has conceded to this writer that the Bible nowhere mandates a certain amount of the bread or the juice, yet they just must leave and form a new work where they can eat and drink as much as they desire. While the love feast and the Passover meal have both been cited to justify this new way of eating and drinking, both fail the test of new-covenant authority (Passover meal) or clear, adequate information (love feast) to justify their practice.

One last idea that seems to be driving such efforts is the hair-brained notion that our only reason for gathering together is to edify each other. Without discounting such

as a legitimate scriptural purpose, let it be pointed out that in our singing we make melody in our hearts and sing with grace in our hearts — both to the Lord (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). When we eat the supper of the Lord on the first day of the week, we remember Christ (1 Cor. 11:25, 29). Is not prayer an expression of praise and adoration to God (1 Cor. 14:16-17)? One must be trying to miss it to fail to see the vertical dimension of our assembling with the saints, though the horizontal is surely there (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; numerous uses of “edify” in 1 Cor. 14). If they are not careful they will rule the Lord out of their efforts even more than they have already done.

It is simply not right to leave a congregation for such flimsy reasons! Civil law allows it, but divine law forbids it! Splintering falls into this category! Personal preference, apart from personal conviction, never appears as justification for any practice in the New Testament. Self-interest is not more important than the oneness of the Lord’s people (Phil. 2:1-4). All of us need to study this part of Philippians to learn of the oneness the Lord desires that we achieve through humility, not the separateness accomplished through self-esteem. It is a serious matter to regard so lightly all of the appeals for unity found in the New Testament.

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Church Choirs

The New Testament instructs us to sing. Just as God specified that “gopher” was the wood he desired for the ark (Gen. 6:14), he specified that “singing” was the music he desired for the church (Col. 3:16). This excludes every other kind of music.

The singing of the church should be congregational. It is to be a reciprocal action, meaning that everyone participates in the song service. Paul wrote:

Speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19, ASV).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God (Col. 3:16, ASV).

The terms “one to another” (*heautois*) and “one another” (*heautou*) are grammatically classified as reciprocal pronouns. They represent an interchange of action.

Uninspired sources also indicate that singing should involve the whole congregation. Note the following quotes: “In the early church, the whole congregation joined in the singing” (*The Ancient Church* 193, 423). “The prevailing mode of singing during the first three centuries was congregational. The whole congregation united their voices in the sacred song of praise” (*Ancient Christianity Exemplified* 329, 330). Eusebius, an early church father, declared that the churches congregational singing was so loud that it could be heard by those standing outside!

I have heard some brethren argue that the church at Corinth had a choir or special singing group (1 Cor. 14:26). If that is not an assumption, what is it? I wonder if they would take the same approach to other passages, like the “feasts of charity” in Jude 12? Could one not argue in favor

of church-sponsored meals on the same grounds? Both are mere assumptions.

There are two important things to remember about 1 Corinthians 14:26: (1) The assembly under discussion was a special circumstance, involving miraculous spiritual gifts. (2) It does not mention singing. A psalm can be read or quoted, just as easy as it can be sung.

APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

What passage authorizes the church to have a choir or special singing group? Is there such a passage? (Scripture?)

Who is selected for the special singing groups? Those who have the most talent singing? If so, is that fair to the other members? (Scripture?)

Who is in charge of selecting the singers? Is it the responsibility of the elders or someone else? (Scripture?)

Will the group perform in front of the congregation? If so, can women participate in the group? (Scripture?)

Is this not engaging in worship by proxy? If the church can employ a special group to sing for others, can it employ a special group to commune for others too? If not, why not? (Scripture?)

In order to please God, we must have authority (Matt. 7:21-23; Col. 3:17; 2 Tim. 2:5; 1 Pet. 4:11; 2 John 9). The New Testament only authorizes congregational singing!



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When Did Jesus of Nazareth Die?

A.D. 33 or A.D. 30? How Can We Know?

We have heard preachers say and have read in commentaries and religious journals that Jesus died in A.D. 33. That, however, is in error, and the problem lies with a foolish mistake made by one Dionysius Exiguus back shortly after A.D. 525. Jesus actually died in A.D. 30 or earlier. How did such a foolish mistake happen and who is Dionysius Exiguus?

Dionysius was a monk, born in Scythia (now Russia on the Black Sea) in c. A.D. 500 and died c. 560. He was a theologian of some note, a mathematician and astronomer. And he was well versed in cannon law, having written many ecclesiastical canons, including the councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon.

In 525 Pope John asked him to look ahead and set out the dates that Easter would fall on from the year 527 to 626, with a view to producing some order in the celebration of Easter. Dionysius decided to begin with what he considered to be the year of Jesus' birth. He chose the year in which Rome had been founded and determined from the evidence known to him that Jesus was born 753 years after the beginning of Rome.

He made a terrible mistake. From the evidence he had (suggestions of Hyppolytus [170-236]), he thought Jesus was born on December 25. Hyppolytus was wrong in thinking:

- God created the earth on March 25;
- The Son of God could not be imperfect;
- Therefore Jesus must have been conceived on March 25.
- This means that he must have been born nine months later — December 25.

We know that Jesus was born before Herod the Great, King of Palestine, died (Matt. 2:1) which was the time of a census made in the territory of Herod in keeping with a

decree of Augustus when Quirinius (some versions call him Cyrinius) was governor of Syria (Luke 2:1).

At the time of Jesus' birth, a star led the Magi of the East to seek him in Jerusalem, whom they later found in Bethlehem. They saw Herod in Jerusalem. Herod died in the spring of 4 B.C., after ruling for thirty-seven years.

Dionysius decided to shift from the birth of Jesus to his death; from Easter to Christmas. But he made a mistake in his calculations, maybe he had never read the gospel account of the birth of Jesus. As a result, the beginning of the millennium, 2000 was not 2000 at all, but was 2004.

If you are good in math, you know that Dionysius made another serious error. At the end of the year 753, on the then current Roman calendar, he called the beginning of 754, "Year One" of the world order — *anno domini* or the year of our Lord. The concept of naught didn't come to Europe from Arabia and India (Europe used Roman numerals without the naught). As a result, centuries end with naught and begin with the digit one. So the year 2000 was the end of one millennium but not the beginning of the next: that was 2001.

It was left to Pope Gregory to police up the calendar. On 24 February 1582, the calendar lost eleven days. To bring the calendar of Dionysius in sync with the sun, October 4, became October 15, and to avoid further adjustments leap year was established.

Life's best outlook is a
prayerful uplook.

Why Netra Murphy Was Baptized: To Accept the Blood of Christ

God offers salvation to all men but does not force anyone to be saved. Therefore, God offers access to the blood of Christ through obedience to conditions revealed in the gospel of Christ.

On Monday, June 16, 2003, Netra Murphy was baptized in a therapy tub at the Norton Audubon Hospital in Louisville, Kentucky. At her request, she was baptized by her brother, Anthony Hester, who is a member of the Hebron Lane Church of Christ in Shepherdsville. Why would a person who is very sick with cancer go to all the trouble to be baptized while in the hospital? Netra was baptized in order to accept the blood of Christ as the basis of her salvation and, thus, to become a child of God, a true Christian.

Netra, like every other human being, was made “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:26-27). Because God made the spirit of man in his image, he is called “the Father of spirits” (Heb. 12:9). We were created in the image of God in order to have fellowship with him for time and eternity.

Sin breaks our fellowship with God. He is holy and will not tolerate sin in his presence or fellowship. God said, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). Netra, like all of us, chose to sin: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Her sins separated her from God.

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST: THE PERFECT SACRIFICE FOR OUR SINS

The blood of Christ is the basis of salvation. Jesus Christ came into the world to die as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5-6). “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

The blood or death of Christ is the basis for the salvation of Netra and for all of us, as Jesus said, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

God offers salvation to all men but does not force anyone to be saved. Therefore, God offers access to the blood of Christ through obedience to conditions revealed in the gospel of Christ. By meeting the God-given conditions, man accepts the blood of Christ as the basis of salvation. By rejecting those conditions, man rejects the blood of Christ and stubbornly persists in his sins. “But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not

baptized of him” (Luke 7:30).

HEAR THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

To accept the blood of Christ, a person must first be willing to hear, learn, and understand God’s plan for our salvation. Jesus explained this step when he said, “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me” (John 6:45). Because men must hear the gospel before they can be saved by it, Jesus told his Apostles, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

Netra was willing to listen and to learn. On Sunday, June 15, she listened intently in her hospital bed as Andy Alexander explained God’s plan for our salvation directly from the Bible. Jesus said some people close their minds, “lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted” (Matt. 13:15). The gospel cannot save a person whose mind is closed.

BELIEVE THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

To accept the blood of Christ, a person must put his faith or trust in Jesus Christ and his teaching. In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). Paul wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16).

When Jesus was here, some people learned enough to believe he is the Savior, but “they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42-43). That is why James wrote that no one can be saved “by faith only” — faith leads to salvation only if it is living, active, working,

obedient faith. “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (Jas. 2:24-26).

Netra decided to be baptized by “the obedience of faith” in Christ (Rom.16:26). She believed in Christ — believed what he taught — that is why she obeyed him. Netra realized that failure to obey Christ is unbelief, and Christ said that those who do not believe him will be lost in hell (Mark 16:16). “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). Other translations of the phrase, “he that believeth not,” say, “he who does not obey” (NAS). Obedience is the real test of faith.

REPENTANCE ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION

To accept the blood of Christ, a person must repent or turn away from the love of sin. Those who crucified Christ were offered forgiveness, but only if they were willing to repent: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Paul preached that all men must “repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20). In other words, true repentance results in a change of life. Through the gospel of Christ, God commands “all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30).

By her obedient faith, Netra repented of her sins.

OPEN CONFESSION OF CHRIST

To accept the blood of Christ, a person must confess openly his faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Jesus said, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I

also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32-33). The gospel teaches “that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:9-10). When a man asked Philip to baptize him, Philip said, “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37).

By obedient faith, Netra confessed Christ in a clear, firm voice before her baptism.

BAPTISM: THE BLOOD OF CHRIST ACCEPTED AND APPLIED

To accept the blood of Christ, a person must submit to baptism by the command of Jesus Christ. When Jesus sent his Apostles to preach the gospel plan of salvation, he told them to preach, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). When the Apostles began preaching, they obeyed Christ and taught men to repent “and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Jesus had explained the basis of salvation by explaining that his blood must be shed “for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28). He guided his Apostles to use that very same expression in explaining how men may receive salvation through his blood: They must be baptized “for the remission of sins.”

When Philip preached this salvation to the eunuch from Ethiopia, this man first confessed his faith in Christ, and then “they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him” (Acts 8:35-38). God sent Ananias to tell Paul how to receive the blood of Christ: “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

To be buried in water baptism is to be “baptized into Jesus Christ,” “baptized into his death” (Rom. 6:3-4).

By being baptized, Netra called upon the Lord to apply the blood of Christ to her soul and to wash away her sins.

BAPTISM URGENT BECAUSE ESSENTIAL

The gospel teaches the urgency of baptism because it is necessary in order for people outside of Christ to receive his blood. When the Apostles first preached the gospel, people who believed in Christ were baptized “the same day,” “the same hour of the night,” “straightway” (Acts 2:41; 16:33). As soon as Netra understood the gospel and was convinced of its truth, she wanted to be baptized immediately. That is why she was baptized in spite of her being very sick and in the hospital. The nurses took a hands-off approach, perhaps fearing legal liabilities, but Netra signed a consent form. Then, she had to be partially sealed in Saran wrap to protect incisions from the water. Four or five of us worked together to fill a therapy tub with water, take her bed down to the therapy room, and lift her into and out of the water-filled tub. It was difficult for her to obey the gospel under these circumstances, but she immediately rejoiced when she was baptized because she knew her sins were washed away by the blood of Christ!

The gospel teaches that when we are baptized, God adds us to Christ, to the kingdom of Christ, to the body of Christ, or to the church of Christ (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-27). Thus, we become “Christians,” people belonging to Christ as the one true Savior (Acts 11:26). As members of his “one body” or church, we learn to worship him according to the instructions he gave in the New Testament (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 4:4-6). His word teaches us how to live a new, clean, holy life as we follow in his footsteps.

Many people are told they are saved by faith only — then they delay baptism for weeks or years — and some

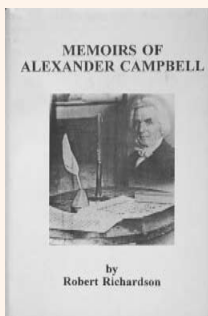
are never baptized. If they are baptized, it is not in order to receive the blood of Christ for salvation, but only to “join the church of your choice,” meaning some man-made denomination such as the Baptist Church, Methodist Church, or Pentecostal Church. Men who promote these churches admit membership is not essential to salvation. Netra was not baptized to join a non-essential, man-made denomination and to wear its name. She wanted only to be saved by the blood of Christ, to wear the name of Christ, and to be added to the church of Christ found in the Bible.

In short, Netra was baptized in order to accept the blood of Christ as the basis of salvation and, thus, to find fellowship with God for time and for eternity. She wanted to live and die in hope of spending eternity in heaven with God because she was created in his image for this purpose. Through the blood of Christ, she now has the “hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Tit. 1:2).

DEATH, THEN JUDGMENT: ARE WE READY?

On Wednesday, June 25, 2003, Netra Murphy died at Audubon Hospital. She was only 41 years old. Her spirit returned to God who gave it, and her body was buried in the Cain Family Cemetery in Shepherdsville to await the great resurrection day (Eccl. 12:7; John 5:28-29). “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Like Netra, we all must face our appointment with death. Like Netra, we do not know when death will take us from this earth. Are we prepared for death and judgment?

Netra was baptized in order to accept the blood of Christ as the perfect sacrifice for the remission of her sins. Dear reader, have you accepted the blood of Christ? “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).



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Joe R. Price

“Learning From Israel’s Defeat at Ai”

Joshua attacked Ai in keeping with the Lord’s command to utterly destroy the people dwelling in Canaan so that the children of Israel could take possession of the land as God had promised them. But there was a problem in this battle. Israel was defeated! Why? Because there was *sin* in the camp. We read in Joshua 7:10-12:

So the Lord said to Joshua: Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.

At first Joshua did not understand why it was that God’s chosen people were destroyed in this battle. But Joshua did not know that someone in their own camp had transgressed God’s earlier instructions to them, which was not to take anything from the enemy to keep for themselves. But someone did, and that someone was a man named Achan! As a result of his sin, he was destroyed, and not only him, but his wife, children, livestock, and all his belongings! Other lives were destroyed because of this one man’s transgression against Almighty God. He knew the rules that God had put forth, yet he still chose to disobey those rules. What was the result? Death to him and his family. This was a sad price to pay for selfishness. We can and should learn a valuable lesson from this story.

LEARNING FROM YESTERDAY’S MISTAKES

God gave specific instructions for the children of Israel not to take those things which had once belonged to the enemy, in this case Ai. But because of one man’s disobe-

dience, several men lost their lives along with his own family. Today we are given specific instructions on how to live our life unto the Lord.

We have been commanded NOT to touch the unclean thing! Paul writes: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what

agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you’” (2 Cor 6:14-18). Are we reading what Paul writes with an open heart here? He says “*be separate!*” As God’s people were a separate people long ago, God’s people are still a separate people to-

day. A Christian simply cannot be pleasing to God and do worldly things also (Matt. 6:24; 1 John 2:15-17). A Christian is said to be a “*special people*” (1 Pet. 2:9). A special person, striving to be well-pleasing in God’s sight will *not* involve himself with those things which are unclean.

We are to put away evil from among us! Again the apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian brethren telling them: “not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner

A Spirit of Cowardice

Ron Daly

“God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and love and of self discipline” (NRSV). Please. note that the text says that “God did not give us a spirit of cowardice.”

God’s people should not be afraid to “tackle” the burning issues of the day! It is not that God needs us, but he *wants* us to resolve that we will stand for truth regardless of the consequences. This implies that we must familiarize ourselves with issues, both great and small. We must equip ourselves to respond to issues by continuous, analytical, and detailed Bible study (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:14-19).

Let’s face the facts: there are preachers, elders, and members generally who do not want controversy, who will not permit controversy, and who *ignore* controversy even if truth suffers at the hands of its enemies! In other words, there is a spirit of cowardice sweeping the brotherhood. Instead of waging an all out war with the gospel’s enemies, they are only ferocious when attacking those who proclaim truth and overthrow error. They befriend false teachers and offend God (2 Tim. 3:8). They are kind to truth’s enemies and pay no mind to truth’s friends. They smile in error’s face and stab truth in the back. They apologize to the proponents of error and apologize for the teachers of truth!

Regardless of the issues that arise, there will be people who make excuses for why they privately admit that some prominent men are teaching error, but they do not publicly denounce the error. Most of the time it is due to a spirit of cowardice that permeates their character. Of course, they will not admit it. They will usually say, “Others are more equipped to handle it. I prefer not to stir up any more controversy, I just don’t like to be in brotherhood squabbles.” What they are actually saying is this: “I’m too lazy to equip myself to respond to those who are teaching error. I will let others do it for me, and when the battles have been fought I will line up with the side that is most popular and positive!” Shame, shame is your name. Run and hide is your game. If you don’t take a stand, you will be on the Lord’s left hand (Rev. 21:8).

Acts 15 is proof positive that the apostles *and* elders at Jerusalem were united in opposition to error. They did not remain silent. The text describes Paul and Barnabas as having had “no small dissension and debate with” the Judaizers (vv. 2, 6-7). They were not characterized by a spirit of cowardice and neither should we.

— not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person” (1 Cor. 5:9-13). Just as the children of Israel were told to put away the evil from among them (in their case to destroy what was taken and to kill Achan and his family), we are also to rid the Lord’s church from evil that may creep in. Our role as Christians is to “seek and save the lost” and not to tolerate evil. God does not tolerate evil and neither should we. Evil is not of God, it is of the Devil! When we associate ourselves with evil, we are committing adultery against God (Jas. 4:4)! We should learn from long ago that

God did not tolerate evil then, and he certainly does not tolerate evil today.

God promises the fall of those who do not obey him!

Just as he promised that those who did not obey his will would be punished long ago, God will punish us today if we choose not to obey him. Jesus became the “author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Heb. 5:9). Only those of us who obey his teaching will be saved, just as those of Israel who obeyed God were saved. May we always learn from the lessons of old how to live our life today.

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Biting and Devouring in the Context

(Editor's Note: *Reproduced below is an article from Ben Vick who preaches for the institutional Shelbyville Road church in Indianapolis. The article is excellent and has value for our readers because it is not written by one among us with an axe to grind. He is addressing problems within his own fellowship where similar criticisms have been made about those resisting the advancement of liberalism in their own fellowship. We commend the article to you. Mike Willis)*

When one opposes sin and sinful men with the sword of the Spirit, sometimes those who feel the piercing will hurl the charge at the one who has wielded the sword by accusing him of biting and devouring his brothers and sisters in Christ. "Biting and devouring" is taken from Paul's words in Galatians 5:15. Is such a charge a proper application of the verse, or is it handling the word of God deceitfully? Let us consider the context of "but if ye bite

and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another."

To the churches of Galatia Paul wrote, "I would they were even cut off which trouble you. For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:12-16.)

The churches of Galatia were troubled with Judaizing teachers who attempted to bind circumcision on Gentile Christians. Concerning these false teachers, Paul said, "I would they were even cut off which trouble you." Paul used a strong play on words here. Just as circumcision was a cutting off of the foreskin, so Paul wished that these false teachers were cut off from the body of Christ. Then Paul said, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty." The word "for" introduces the reason for the preceding statement. Paul wished that these false teachers were cut off because they were attempting to rob Christians of their liberty in Christ (Gal. 2:4-5). But their liberty in Christ was not to be used as a springboard to sin. Liberty in Christ does not grant one a license to sin. It does not grant one the right to hurt his brother. Galatians 5:14 begins with the same word, "For" which assigns the reason why one should not use his liberty to hurt a brother. To do so is to fulfill the law which, in a word, says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev. 19-18; Luke 10:29; Jas. 2:8).

In contrast with loving one's neighbor as himself, Paul wrote, "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Gal. 5:15) This is a conditional sentence that assumes that they were biting and devouring one another.



Evidently, they were pressing their views in the realm of liberty to the point of personal attacks upon each other. They were not loving their neighbors as themselves. In matters of liberty, we must be careful not to press our views to the point of hurting others.

Contrary to the hurled accusation, Paul was not teaching that it is wrong to rebuke a brother in sin, or to oppose false doctrines. Was Paul guilty of biting and devouring by his charge that the Galatians were biting and devouring one another? In the very book in which these words are found (5:15), Paul used the strongest of language to oppose false teachers. His words in ink, "I would even they were cut off which trouble you," were not even dry upon the paper before he exhorted the brethren not to bite and devour one another. Was Paul biting and devouring others when he wished that the false teachers were cut off? When Paul accused the same of troubling the churches by the perverting of the word of God, was he biting and devouring them (Gal. 1:6-9)? When Paul rebuked Peter before all, was the former biting and devouring the latter? When Paul withstood Peter to the face because he was to be blamed, was the former wrong? Paul refused to kowtow to the dictates of the Judaizing teachers who demanded that Titus be circumcised. Was Paul guilty of biting and devouring them because he would not give ground to them for one hour?

In the same letter the apostle Paul pointed out that the Galatian brethren had turned back to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto they desired to be in bondage. They had turned back to their old way of life. He said, "But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Gal. 4:9-11). Was Paul guilty of biting and devouring them because he expressed concern for their souls?

Consider the broader context of Galatians 5:15. The church at Corinth had all kinds of problems. They were worldly, or carnal, behaving as ordinary men (1 Cor. 3:1-3). There were dissensions and divisions at Corinth. The church had in their midst one guilty of fornication, i.e., one living with his father's wife. Members were taking each other to law before unbelievers. They were perverting the Lord's supper. Some were denying the resurrection. All of these matters, and more, Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians. He rebuked them for their sin. Was he guilty of biting and devouring them because he wrote by inspiration to correct their lives?

Paul commanded Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the *time* will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own

lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:2-4). The older preacher was not encouraging the younger preacher to bite and devour others, but to be true to God by preaching the truth when it is convenient and inconvenient.

The same apostle wrote to the preacher Titus, "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let not man despise thee" (Tit. 2:15). To speak, exhort and rebuke with all authority means to base what is done on a "thus saith the Lord." When one does what the Lord authorizes him to do, he is not guilty of biting and devouring another.

Our Lord's rebuke of the church at Laodicea was strong, for he said, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:15-17). Was Jesus Christ biting and devouring that church by his strong rebuke? Was his motive wrong? Certainly not, for in the same context he said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

To accuse one of being guilty of biting and devouring others because he opposes sin reminds me of old Ahab's charge against Elijah. The prophet prayed that it would not rain in Israel because of king Ahab's wicked ways. During the three and a half years that Israel was without rain, Elijah hid from Ahab. Finally, when they met, Ahab said to Elijah, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Elijah just turned the tables on him by saying, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and hast followed Baalim" (1 Kings 18:17-18). The real troublemakers in Israel today are those who encourage immorality by their lives, or pervert the gospel of Christ by their teaching.

Let us not bite and devour one another lest we be consumed, but let us not fail to expose every false way.

From The Informer, June 15, 2003

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Seven Fundamental Facts About Heaven

Seven Fundamental Facts About Heaven:

- **A real place.**
- **Place of unimaginable joy.**
- **Place God will permit anyone to go to.**
- **Place of eternal bliss.**
- **Abode of two classes of people: the innocent and the obedient.**
- **Place where there will be no desire to escape.**
- **Place that can be for-**

In a previous article (*Truth Magazine* [July 18, 2002] 425), we discussed the subject, *Seven Fundamental Facts About Hell*. In that article, we mentioned that hell is: a *real* place, a *horrible* place, a place where *anyone* can go, a place of *eternal destruction*, an abode of *great classes* of people, a place of *no escape*, and a place that *can be avoided*. The subject of *heaven* is a comforting subject. It is a subject that is misunderstood by many. The word *heaven* is often used in a derogatory way such as the expression “*oh heavens!*” It is a subject that gets much attention. There are even jokes told with *heaven* being the setting of the joke and mention made of “Saint Peter and the pearly gates.” Most people believe they are going there when they die. Although, some deny that heaven exists. Those who deny the existence of hell, must deny that heaven exists to be consistent. What does the Bible teach about heaven? Consider now, Seven Fundamental Facts About Heaven.

First, heaven is a real place! The same Bible that teaches of hell, teaches of heaven. To deny the existence of hell, one must deny the existence of heaven and vice-versa. Likewise, if the Bible says heaven is a *real* place, then that should settle the matter! Since God’s “word is Truth” (John 17:17), and God “cannot lie” (Tit. 1:2), and the fact remains that Jesus promised his disciples he would

go and prepare a place (heaven) for them (John 14:1-6), without a doubt, heaven does exist!

Second, it is a place of unimaginable joy! Unlike hell, heaven is a place of eternal joy and fellowship with Jesus Christ and *all* the righteous (Eph. 1:20). It is the dwelling place of God (Matt. 6:9). It is a place where “God shall wipe away all tears . . . there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4). It is a place of indescribable beauty (Rev. 21:17-21). There is no need for the sun, moon, or stars, for it is illuminated by the glory of God — “there shall be no night there” (Rev. 21:22-26). Heaven is a place of ultimate purity; nothing vile or offensive will be there (Rev. 21:27; 22:14, 15). Truly, it is difficult for the human mind to comprehend such a place as described by the book of God.

Third, it is a place God will permit anyone to go to! Because “God is love” (1 John 4:8), He “is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). But who are the “anyone” who will be there? Only the righteous! Only those who believe and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ! Brethren who persist in apathy, ignorance, stubbornness and rebellion, immorality, compromise of truth, and such like, cannot expect to

gain heaven (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Gal. 5:16-21; Col. 3:1-7; 2 Thess. 2:7, 8; 1 Pet. 4:17-18). God will permit *only* the righteous to be there. Jesus taught, “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:14).

Fourth, it is a place of eternal bliss! Heaven is never-ending! No man can fully comprehend eternity! In this life, time and all good things are swift and fleeting, while bad and difficult times pass by ever so slowly. During moments of joy, “time flies.” Just think how fast time passes! Only thirty-three years ago, I was twenty! “For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (Jas. 4:14). But, the joys of heaven will never end — they will be everlasting and shall never pass away (Matt. 25:46; John 3:16, 36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:27, 40, 47; 12:50; Rom. 6:22, 23; Gal. 6:8; 1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Pet. 1:11).

Fifth, it is the abode of only two classes of people, the innocent and the obedient! The innocent will be there, even the children of Andrea Yates (the Texas mother who meticulously drowned her five small children in the bath tub) will be there and others like these children who have died in an innocent state (Matt. 18:1-6). The obedient will be there: (1) Those who obeyed God during the patriarchal and mosaical dispensations (Heb. 9:15; 11:1-12; 12:1); (2) And those who believed and obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ without question or compromise (Acts 10:35; Rom. 1:16; 10:11-17; 1 Cor. 4:15, 16; 1 Pet. 4:16-18; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Heb. 5:9). Will you and I be there?

Sixth, it is a place where there will be no desire to escape! Those there will be in the presence of God and the righteous of all ages! Have you ever left a place because of the bad company present? There will be no bad company in heaven! It is a place of true bliss that no earthly being can fully describe! Even though

the apostles were inspired, the joy of heaven was not describable even in their words. Paul spoke of the blessings of salvation as an “unspeakable gift” or an indescribable gift (2 Cor. 9:15). What then of heaven? Paul wrote, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). Of salvation Peter wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:3-5). Paul, when he wrote to the Philippians, spoke of his confidence and desire “to be with Christ, which is *far better*” (Phil. 1:23; Emp. mine). There could be no better place to go than *heaven* — the only other place will be *hell*, wherein is the “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41).

Seventh, it is a place that can be forfeited or gained! If you *forfeit* heaven, you *gain* hell! There is no middle ground — one place or the

other! And, it is *possible* to go there! But, we must obey the Lord on his terms! Jesus said,

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Matt. 7:21-27).

Will you and I *forfeit* or *gain* heaven?

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A Matter of Fact

by Kyle Butt

Designed to give teens the information they need to be assured of the truthfulness of Christianity. The author provides evidence in addition to that which he presented in his previous book, *Out With Doubt*. #17151.

\$7.95

Faith “Subjective” or “Objective”

“Subjective” as used here means that which is related to self. Webster says: “relating to or determined by the mind as the subject of experience” (*Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*). Subjective faith is that which comes from the mind of the individual. Not long ago I heard someone say: “When I leave the worship services I want to feel good.” There is nothing wrong about being happy when one obeys God’s will. Acts 8:39 says, “And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.” However to reinvent the worship services in order to produce an emotional high is to show lack of respect for God and his word. Holding up and/or clapping hands while singing, witnessing while partaking of the Lord’s supper, and working one’s self into an emotional frenzy are all based on subjective faith. When you can’t give book, chapter, and verse for it, it is subjective, “within one’s self” faith.

Subjective faith causes people to pat themselves on the chest and say, “I know that I am saved, because I feel it right here.” Subjective faith causes people to say, “I just feel this is right” instead of doing what Peter says in 1 Peter 4:11: “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” Subjective faith causes an individual to go to great lengths to explain away plain passages of Scripture just because they don’t want to believe or obey them. Some of the passages that are being cast aside today are the following: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10).

This passage means the same in any language that you can translate it and no one has or can show otherwise. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in

one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (John 17:20-23). Can Jesus’ prayer be understood. In what language can it be translated where “one” doesn’t mean “one” or the unity described herein doesn’t mean unity. It is no new thing but there are those who are trying to make the word of God mean absolutely nothing.

When you have men write books (*Looking Out For Number One, Why Not The Best* and hundreds of others) extolling themselves and these make the #1 best seller lists for long periods of time, there is a problem with the authors and the purchasers. Society has bought subjectivism hook, line, and sinker. Subjectivism appears to rule in some areas of sports, politics, yes, and even religion.

“Objective faith” looks without self. This person looks to God and his word for guidance. This person doesn’t look to his own feelings for satisfaction. In religion this person wants more than anything to please God. This person realizes more than anything the necessity of living and doing in such a way that his whole life will conform to book, chapter, and verse instructions from God. He will worship according to God’s plan, not his own feelings. He will know that he is a Christian because he has obeyed God, not because of a good feeling in his chest. His motto will *not* be “if it feels good do it,” but he will make such passages as 1 Peter 4:11 his motto: “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17). Can this be understood when translated into another language in another part of the world? Absolutely! People in South Africa, India, the Philippines, or wherever get the same message that people here in the good old USA do.

Why is there a cry for a new hermeneutic? These people don’t want to submit to God. They want to please their own feelings instead of the God of heaven. This is why some of today’s religious authors are so popular. They are pleasing men. They are scratching or tickling men’s ears. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears

The Left Hand of Fellowship

Frank Himmel

Paul taught that Gentiles were saved by obedient faith in Christ, apart from circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses. When that teaching was called in question, he and Barnabas agreed to go to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the church and the apostles there. They met privately with James, Peter, and John. All were in agreement. In Paul's words, these Judean brethren expressed that agreement by giving to him and Barnabas "the right hand of fellowship" (Gal. 2:9).

Even to this day people shake hands as a sign of agreement or commitment. The right hand is universally used. In Isaiah 62:8, God is said to swear by his right hand. Among Christians, *extending the right hand of fellowship* has become a standard expression denoting acceptance of one as a faithful brother in Christ.

I wonder if we now need to add a sister expression to our vocabularies: *the left hand of fellowship*. It could indicate

some approval and joint participation, but only to an extent. It would accurately reflect current thinking.

Some brethren make it their practice to maintain fellowship with men who are teaching false doctrines. They tell us that it is unfair to regard a man as a false teacher simply on the basis of what he teaches; he must also manifest bad motives or a dishonest heart. "We do not at all agree with his position," we are told. But because he is well-liked or well-respected, association is maintained.

What about those who follow his false teaching? "They are engaging in sinful conduct. We can have no fellowship with them." Nevertheless, we can and should continue our association with the teacher. In other words, we may have fellowship with the *proponent* of error but not the *practitioner*. I wonder — what should we do if this man actually starts practicing what he has been preaching?

(concluded bottom of p. 536)

from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Why do some want to make a fable out of the account of creation or the temptation of Eve? Some want to make a fable out of the virgin birth and the real Lord's prayer for unity of believers in John 17:20-23. In fact, any verse that demands unity becomes so complicated, in their minds, that it can't be translated into another language and mean unity. Subjective thinking is at the core of the problem. Re-read the two verses above and you have your answer.

People are thinking within themselves. "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). Paul felt good about what he was doing when he was persecuting the Lord's church. His feelings did not put him on God's side. Obeying God is what made him right with God. "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). When he did this his sins were forgiven (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27; 1 Pet. 3:21).

The "grace-unity" movement among churches of Christ is based on "subjective faith." Because of love of man or ideas they want to expand fellowship to those who are not what God would have them to be. The Church Growth/Community Church movement that is making inroads in churches of Christ in numerous areas has as its basis "subjective faith." They want to do what feels good.

Until people have a sincere heart that really wants to give up self in order to please God they cannot please God. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24).

Individuals have faith. What kind do you have? Is it "subjective faith" that has its basis within you, your feelings, your preferences? Or is it "objective faith" that has its basis in God and his word?

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“Unrestricted Loyalty” continued from front page after preacher send in “confessions” to the *Gospel Advocate* to avoid the quarantine. Many more who did not send in confessions jumped on the more liberal bandwagon. I also saw many brethren, out of a sense of loyalty, continue to encourage and support all of these. Many said, “I do not necessarily agree with their stance, but. . . .” Because of this, many of us had to remind ourselves often that our loyalty had to be to the Lord — no matter what anyone said or did.

My generation was not the first, nor will it be the last, that had to remind itself of this basic fact. Misplaced or extreme loyalty to any person or institution is never good. Institutions are made up of people and people are subject to error. Each individual must guard against being a “partaker of other men’s sins” (1 Tim. 5:22).

No person or group of persons (an institution) is perfect. It would be hard to find any with whom we would perfectly agree on every subject. I think we all recognize this. But, sometimes both individuals and institutions adopt practices and policies that are so egregious that we just cannot afford to support and/or encourage their efforts. In such cases a loyal friend would want to do anything that he might rightfully do to try to get them to reverse course, but if they will not, they no longer deserve the loyalty of the faithful.

Loyalty to a person or group has caused many, like Saul, to play the fool and err exceedingly (cf. 1 Sam. 26:21). How many have there been who have allowed their loyalty to a family member to cause them to defend the indefensible on various Bible subjects concerning the home? How many

If Peter and John would have opposed Paul’s stance but all the while freely maintained their association with him, does not *the left hand of fellowship* seem a more fitting designation? Of course, the real question is whether they would have done such a thing. It was John who warned us against association with those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11). Paul’s instructions were, “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them” (Rom. 16:17). Note that in this passage it is the *effect*, not the *motivation*, of false teaching that requires us to take action.

Whatever difficulties we may have in consistently applying this principle does not negate the principle. When men teach that it is right to do what the Lord said is sinful, and when they persist after brethren have pointed out their error, it is time to quit walking hand-in-hand, right or left.

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are there whose loyalty to a school or paper has led them to either bury their heads in the sand, or even worse, to defend the institution regardless of what its practices or policies may have become? How many have stayed for years with a congregation that practiced unscriptural innovations, out of loyalty to that congregation, its preacher, and its people? Yet, all the while claiming that they do not necessarily agree with the practices that have been introduced?

If I should not be unconditionally loyal to a congregation, how much more should I not be to a human institution, even if it is run by brethren. I read somewhere that the late Foy Wallace, Jr. once remarked, “With some brethren, you can criticize the Lord’s church as much as you please, but woe be unto you if you criticize a school or other institution run by brethren.” This may not be the exact quote, but it is the gist of it as I remember it. I think I have seen this to be true for a long time now.

I am persuaded that the heartache and division that my generation experienced in the decades following World War II can be traced to a misplaced and excessive loyalty to men. When beloved preachers, papers, schools, and congregations departed from the Lord’s way, many could not bring themselves to break with them — because of strong loyalty and friendship.

My fervent prayer is that this present generation, and generations to follow, will be wiser and understand where their loyalty must be — to the Lord.

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“Heresy Trials” continued from page 2

insists on teaching beliefs that threaten the eternal lives of all who hear them, that person must be disciplined and his harmful teaching rendered null within the church.

It is easy for a comfortable “Christian” society to demonize the mechanisms the historic church has developed to deal with heresy. But to wink at heresy is to suck the life from faith.

Heresies are worth fighting against, through the same kinds of mechanisms that the church has always used. Yes, these mechanisms are tainted by politics and pride. But somehow still, we must believe, they have been used and will continue to be used by the Holy Spirit for the health of his church. . . .

Some of Armstrong’s words reflect the denominational concepts and machinery that are part of twentieth century denominationalism, but his point on heresy is well taken.

For most of the twentieth century, the Protestant churches in America sought unity through the principles of ecumenism. In the name of pluralism, every kind of doctrinal aberration has been tolerated and brought under the umbrella of the fellowship in the “Christian” church (i.e., modern denominationalism). The broadened fellowship has gotten so bad in these churches that voices such as Armstrong’s are beginning to be raised to sound the alarm about the toleration of heresy within their fellowship. Hamilton and McKinney quoted Richard Steele’s comment about pluralism in the Methodist Church, “It’s hard to imagine any theological position that would get you convicted of heresy in the United Methodist Church — except, perhaps, for teaching that heresy deserves to be a chargeable offense” (*op. cit.* 34). The pluralism of mainline Protestantism has occurred at the same time that these churches are losing members — United Methodist Church down 21%; Disciples of Christ down 55%; United Church of Christ down 39%, Episcopal Church down 33%. In contrast, Evangelical groups are growing. The mainline churches may be faced with death or renewal as their only alternative.

Perhaps this is the beginning of a conservative revival in American Protestantism. We have already seen the beginnings of a politically conservative movement, as manifested in recent elections. Without judging which is the cause and which is the effect, perhaps we can identify as well a conservative shift in American religion. Perhaps Armstrong’s words reflect the first breezes signaling a change in the religious weather patterns.

YEARS BEHIND

I remember hearing my brother, Cecil, preach that the Lord’s church always trails 20-30 years behind the denominations pursuing a fad. When the fad has just about fizzled out among the denominations, our brethren get excited about it and start picking it up. Think about some examples of this, such as the bus ministry, campaigns for Christ, and other such denominational claptrap. (Some are doing the same thing today with other denominational tactics — an interdenominational name for the church, using recreation to draw young people to attend youth rallies [paid for by parents rather than the church budget, of course], and catchy titles for sermons [“Seven Ducks in A Muddy Pond,” “Who Moved Paul’s Cheese,” etc.]) We may be in that cycle when the denominations are about to reject ecumenism and pluralism, but some of us are attracted to it. The denominations have followed ecumenism until it led them directly into universalism — the toleration of every person’s personal concept of what it means to be religious, even to the point of accepting a female deity as suggested by Christian feminists. Now, some who have witnessed it go so far are saying, “It is time to have some heresy trials.”

About the time this happens, a significant number of

brethren adopt the principles of ecumenism and pluralism (under a different name of course). We are told that we should not hold to the traditional view of divorce and remarriage, but should be tolerant of those who disagree with us on the subject. Hence, we should have an on-going and never ending fellowship with those who teach and practice what brother Hailey taught on divorce and remarriage (and by implication, what Olan Hicks, Jerry Bassett, Glen Lovelady, etc.). Those who disagree are pejoratively described as “guardians of the flock” and “watchdogs.” We have been told that we cannot know whether the days of creation were six, twenty-four hour days or long eons of time (or 24-hour days separated by long eons of time). Rather, we should be tolerant of the different views that brethren hold about the matter. We have been told that a literal serpent did not appear to Adam and Eve in the Garden. We have been told a world-wide flood did not occur. All of these doctrines are to be tolerated.

However, the person and doctrine which cannot be tolerated is the man who says, “If any man speak let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11) and makes application of that doctrine to present departures from the truth. Such a person is a dangerous man who must be quarantined and isolated. He must be driven from the flock of God before he causes more damage than those teaching heresy. So it seems this is what some of our brethren have done and are doing.

Just as we begin to see encouraging signs that twenty-first century denominationalism may be moving away from its ecumenical policies, our brethren head toward the pluralism and ecumenical stance which some denominationalists are beginning to abandon.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Without regard to what some brethren decide to do or what is happening in twenty-first century denominationalism, Christians are guided by the testimony of Scripture. What does Scripture say about fellowshiping those who teach unrevealed doctrines? Read it for yourself:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate,

saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 6:14 - 7:1).

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

In contrast to these Scriptures, I ask, “What Scriptures admonish the church to maintain an on-going and never-ending fellowship with those who are teaching damnable heresy?” Perhaps some do not believe that clinging to and practicing false doctrines jeopardizes one’s salvation. Whereas we recognize the principle that weak members must be worked with to bring them to full spiritual maturity (Eph. 4:14-16), the principle of receiving into one’s fellowship those who open advocates of heresy is contrary to God’s word.

Using Armstrong’s analogy of Jack the Ripper, think about the attitude some among us manifest today. Some would say, “I am against murder and mutilation, but we should not mention ‘Jack the Ripper’s’ name when we preach against murder and mutilation. Some of his friends or kinsfolk may not come back if we mention his name from the pulpit.” Others would say, “The problem of murder and mutilation by Jack the Ripper is an East London problem. Our church is not troubled by Jack. Why do we need a newspaper writing about what he has done in East London and broadcasting it all over the city? The real problem is those detectives and journalists who are trying to drive Jack out of the city. These ‘guardians of the city’ and self-proclaimed ‘watchdogs’ are the real problem. We should drive out these detectives and journalists from among us, destroy their influence among faithful brethren, and then we can have peace and harmony.” What is so ludicrous when we speak about “Jack the Ripper” who can only destroy the body is not viewed as ludicrous when the “Jack the Ripper” is a spiritual assassin who destroys the souls of unsuspecting brethren. Must one wait until he attacks and destroys one of his own children before he gets alarmed?

PAINTED INTO A CORNER

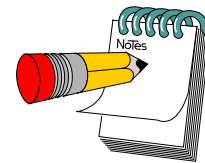
Hamilton and McKinney observed that liberals in mainline denominations have painted themselves into a corner; they wrote, “One great irony is that theological pluralism — the very thing evangelicals decry — may be what has allowed them (Evangelicals, mw) to remain (in their denomination, mw). By defending pluralism, liberals have painted themselves into a corner. To move too aggres-

sively against evangelicals would open them to charges of hypocrisy” (*op. cit.* 40).

Mainline Protestant denominationalists are not the only ones to paint themselves into a corner. Those who objected to brethren exposing brother Hailey’s loose views on divorce and remarriage and the teaching of a non-literal interpretation of Genesis 1 at Florida College by Shane Scott and Hill Roberts, have also painted themselves into a corner. Inasmuch as these brethren have been so vocal against those who exposed Hailey and those who exposed Scott and Roberts, they cannot consistently lift their voices to oppose other false doctrines and false teachers among us. While quarantining the “guardians of the truth,” they tolerate every loose doctrine being taught among us without one word of objection. Such toleration of loose doctrines is the essence of the pluralism which some denominational leaders are just beginning to forsake. These leaders saw where it took them and are seeking evangelical renewal. What they know that some among us have not learned is that the same principles that allow an on-going and never-ending fellowship with those who reject one part of God’s word will allow an ongoing and never-ending fellowship with those who reject any other or all other parts of his word. Must we go to the end of the same road before we learn its destination?

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Quips & Quotes



Preston-Thrasher Debates

A public debate on the A.D. 70 doctrine is scheduled for Saturday, September 20, 2003, in the auditorium of Athens Bible School, 507 S. Hoffman, Athens, Alabama 35611. Three sessions are to be held (10:00 a.m., 2:00 p.m., and 7:00 p.m.).

In the first two sessions, Don K. Preston of Ardmore, Oklahoma will affirm: “Resolved: The Bible teaches that the resurrection of the dead occurred at the time of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.” Thomas N. Thrasher of Decatur, Alabama will deny.

In the third session, Thrasher will affirm: “Resolved: The Bible teaches that all the dead will be raised to life at the end of the current Christian age.” Preston will deny.

A second debate in Indianapolis on the same propositions is set for Saturday, March 13, 2004. The location will be the Embassy Suites North, 3912 Vincennes Road, Indianapolis,

Indiana 46268. Thrasher will affirm at the 10:00 a.m. session and Preston will affirm at the 2:00 p.m. session. There will be only two sessions.

For additional information, you may contact Thomas N. Thrasher, 1705 Sandra St., S.W., Decatur, AL 35601-5457 (E-mail: tnthrash@hiwaay.net).

Vatican Fuels Firestorm Over Gay Marriage

“Washington — The Vatican condemned gay marriages and adoptions Thursday, touching off a firestorm of controversy world wide one day after President Bush weighed in against legalizing same-sex unions in the United States.

“Marriage exists solely between a man and a woman. . . . Marriage is holy, while homosexual acts go against the natural moral law,” said the Vatican’s orthodoxy watchdog, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

“. . . It is said Catholics and non-Catholics alike have a ‘moral duty’ to fight the trend toward affording more legal rights to gay men and lesbians.

“. . . The strongly worded statement was criticized by gay rights supporters across North America and Europe and embraced by religious conservatives, including some in the United States who are pushing Bush to back a proposed constitutional amendment banning gay marriage here.

“. . . The issue of gay marriage became a hot debate topic this summer after two Canadian provinces, following the lead of several European countries, began recognizing gay marriages. At the same time, the U.S. Supreme Court threw out the nation’s remaining sodomy laws, ruling in a Houston case that homosexuals, like their heterosexual neighbors, have a constitutional right to privacy in the bedroom” (Houston Chronicle [August 1, 2003], 1A, 6A).

Americans Less Tolerant on Gay Issues

“Washington — Americans have become significantly less accepting of homosexuality since a Supreme Court decision that was hailed as clearing the way for new gay civil rights, a USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll has found.

“After several years of growing tolerance, the survey shows a return to a level of more traditional attitudes last seen in the mid-1990s.

“Asked whether same-sex relations between consenting adults should be legal, 48% said yes; 46% said no. Before this month, support hadn’t been that low since 1996.

“. . . The shift in attitudes comes after a spate of headlines on gay issues. In recent weeks, the Supreme Court struck down a Texas anti-sodomy law, A Canadian court decision allowed gay couples to marry in Ontario, and Wal-Mart expanded anti-

discrimination protection to gay workers.

“. . . The survey also found rising opposition to civil unions that would give gay couples some of the rights of married heterosexuals. They were opposed 57%-40%, the most opposition since the question was first asked in 2000” (USA Today [July 29, 2003], 1A).

Public High School For Gays Set to Open

“The country’s first public high school for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students will open its doors in New York this fall. The Harvey Milk School, named after a gay San Francisco politician assassinated in 1978, is an expansion of a public school program that has been operating out of two classrooms since 1984. The city will spend \$3.2 million to expand that program to 100 students. ‘Everybody feels that it’s a good idea because some of the kids who are gays and lesbians have been constantly harassed and beaten in other schools,’ Mayor Michael Bloomberg said Monday. The school will follow mandatory English and math programs while specializing in computer technology, arts and culinary arts. Mike Long, the head of the New York State Conservative Party, criticized the plan. ‘This makes absolutely no sense,’ he said. ‘There’s no reason these children should be treated separately’” (USA Today [July 29, 2003], 7D).

Not-So-Great Danes

“Lutheran minister Thorkild Grosboel of Taarbaek, Denmark, was suspended by his bishop after telling a newspaper, ‘There’s no heavenly God, there is no eternal life, there is no resurrection.’ (Only the state, not bishops, can fire ministers. He later said he was misquoted, and that he believes ‘in something divine, but not in a God who created man and the ant.’ Bishop Lise-Lotte Rebel told the AFP news service that the remarks were ‘unacceptable, created doubt and confusion,’ but the congregation disagrees. ‘If there is no place for our pastor in this church, then there is no place for many of us either,’ said the head of the parish council at a protest attended by hundreds” (Christianity Today [August 2003], 17).

Preacher Needed

Albion, Illinois: The church in Albion (southern Illinois) is in need of a full-time preacher. The congregation size averages 65 and consists of an even balanced age grouping. If interested, send name, background information, and salary requirements to Albion Church of Christ, Route 15 East, Albion, IL 62806 or contact Kent Deisher at (618) 263-4440 or Mark McDaniel at (618) 445-2800.