

TRUTH MAGAZINE LECTURES: OBSERVATIONS ON J.T. SMITH'S OBSERVATIONS

Brother J.T. Smith offers his observations on the Truth Magazine Lectures in an article entitled "Truth Magazine Lectures Announcement" (*Gospel Truths*, June 2009). "He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him" (Prov. 18:17). Some observations on brother Smith's observations are in order so that the reader may heed the Latin maxim, "*Audi alteram partem*:" "Listen to both sides."

1 Timothy 3:15: Universal or Local Church?

The front page article by another writer states his view, brother Smith says. It argues that 1 Timothy 3:15 refers to the local church and not the universal church when it speaks of "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Brother Smith seems to think this is of momentous importance in his opposition to the Truth Magazine Lectures. If *only* he can prove this verse says the *local* church is the pillar and ground of the truth, it is *sinful* for the Guardian of Truth Foundation to provide Bible lectures: i.e., to invite men to teach God's Word for the benefit of anyone who would like to take advantage of such Bible lessons. So, which is it in 1 Timothy 3:15, the universal or the local church?

Neither application of the passage excludes individuals engaged in a business such as Gospel Truths, Inc. or Guardian Of Truth Foundation doing all they can to teach God's Word while conducting their business. If the passage refers to the universal church, it means Christians have the duty to teach the truth of God's Word according to their abilities and opportunities. If the passage refers to the local church, it means local churches have the duty to teach the truth, but that does not exclude individuals utilizing all possible abilities and opportunities to teach. We all know there are passages teaching both principles and they are not mutually exclusive.

The exercise of individual duties and privileges to teach God's Word, even in the course of conducting a business, even in concert with two or more individuals, is not in competition with the work of local churches. The New Testament teaches that local churches are *independent* and *autonomous* as they function to fulfill their mission (Acts 14:23; 20:28). *Independent* and *autonomous* means functioning separately from all other local churches. *Independent* and *autonomous* means functioning separately from the activities of individuals (whether the individual is working in total isolation from anyone else or in association with others as might be done in a business such as Gospel Truths, Inc., or the Guardian of Truth Foundation). *Independent* and *autonomous* means functioning separately from denominational headquarters, councils, boards, and societies designed to centralize the work of local churches.

Jumping from an Ambiguous Premise to an Illogical Conclusion

In an argument based on his perception of consequences, brother Smith argues that "the church may support two people working together" and therefore "the church may support the GOTF Lectures." His premise is vague, ambiguous, and misleading. What does he mean when he makes a sweeping generalization with the assumption that everyone agrees to it: "the church may support two people working together"?

The church may give support directly to one individual, then another, and then another, as they go out preaching (Phil. 4:15). So, yes, it may support several men who are preaching. But the church does not support several men by giving a lump sum to "the several men group" and leaving them to figure out how to divide and utilize the funds. They are not supported as agents of "the several men group," whether that group works in concert without legal constitution, or whether it be organized under legal auspices as a

business for profit, a non-profit business, a tax-exempt foundation, or any other sort of organization. The church supports each individual evangelist *individually*.

No, the church is not authorized to donate funds to the GOTF, Gospel Truths, Inc., or any other human institution. The charter of the GOTF forbids soliciting or receiving such donations because of our rock-solid conviction that such actions are unauthorized by Scripture and are thus sinful.

The general principle stated in Ecclesiastes 4:9 is illustrated by what we are doing and by what brother Smith is doing: "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor." Brother Smith believes that just as Aquila and Priscilla worked together to teach God's Word, he can work with others via Gospel Truths, Inc. to teach through the *Gospel Truths* magazine for the benefit of anyone who would like to take advantage of such Bible lessons. The existence of this legally constituted business organization, based on *individual responsibilities*, functioning in *the realm of individual duties*, does not imply that churches could donate funds to the organization. To jump to the conclusion that such a consequence is implied is not logical, necessary, or accurate.

“Wherefore Receive Ye One Another” (Rom. 15:7)

Brother Smith argues that Romans 14-15 requires brethren practicing something to which others object to cease and desist from such a practice. No, the passage teaches that a brother who eats meat may continue his practice but must do so without forcing the objector to violate his conscience by eating. A brother who cannot conscientiously eat meat may keep his conscience clear without forcing the rule of his conscience on the consciences of brethren who eat meat.

Paul addressed the brother who eats meat and the brother who abstains, instructing them to receive each other without endless disputing:

1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

2 For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.

4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind (Rom. 14:1-5).

Brother Smith's application of the passage would require the one who eats to *stop* eating simply because someone objects. A consistent application of his interpretation would require him to *cease and desist* from using multiple containers in serving the Lord's Supper, using Bible classes, using literature, permitting women to teach children's and ladies' classes, and serving as a located preacher. Why? Because there are brethren who object to all these practices! Surely brother Smith would agree that the proper application is to teach someone who objects to women teaching, to using literature, or to serving as a located preacher to abstain from those things *without binding these scruples on all brethren as essential for salvation and fellowship*. Surely he would agree that brethren who utilize such expediciencies should do so *without enticing or forcing an objector to participate*. If a lady cannot conscientiously teach a class, do not force her to do so. If a brother cannot conscientiously use literature, do not entice him to do so.

Paul did not say that those who eat meat should abstain because some object, but rather he taught that those who eat should not force or entice the abstainers to eat meat. "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his

brother's way" (Rom. 14:13). The "stumblingblock or...occasion to fall" occurs when the abstainer actually eats the meat in violation of his conscience: "For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence" (vs. 20). A similar passage warns against using our liberty in a manner which causes "the conscience of him which is weak (to) be emboldened to eat" (1 Cor. 8:9-10).

Are we to understand that because brethren conducting the business of the GOTF provide the Truth Magazine Lectures brother Smith's conscience has been emboldened to attend and participate in spite of his scruples? Is he now planning to propose that Gospel Truths, Inc. likewise conduct the Gospel Truths Magazine Lectures in violation of his conscience?

It is our understanding of Romans 14-15 that in offering the Truth Lectures we should make no effort to force, intimidate, or entice brother Smith or others who object to participate in any way. In keeping with this passage we respect the conscientious views of such brethren. We have even included open forums and panel discussions where those who object may air their objections in an atmosphere of mutual respect. No effort is being made to isolate and quarantine brethren who do not participate in the lectures as unfaithful and unworthy of fellowship.

Is our failure to bow to the demands of brother Smith to end the lectures causing division in the church, thus violating Romans 14-15, as he charges? No, because we do not demand brother Smith to attend or even to endorse the lectures in order for us to receive him as a faithful brother. Or, is he causing confusion, tension, and a factional spirit by insisting that we let his conscientious scruples be our guide, thus violating the passage? Let brother Smith say whether he will receive those of us who participate in the lectures as faithful brethren.

If we refuse to receive brother Smith because he cannot go against his conscience to attend the lectures, we are judging him as unfaithful to God and unworthy of our fellowship. This would be parallel to someone refusing to receive a brother because he cannot eat meat against his scruple, and would violate Romans 14-15. If brother Smith demands we cease and desist from the lectures, and refuses to receive us because we do not follow his conscience, he likewise is judging us as unfaithful to God and unworthy of his fellowship. This would be parallel to someone with a scruple against eating meat demanding that those who eat abstain, and refusing to receive them if they did not. This would equally violate the passage. Let us both heed the admonition of the Holy Spirit, "But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10). As we each apply the admonition not to "judge one another any more," we "follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (vv. 13, 19).

Since brother Smith felt Romans 14 needed more discussion, let him now say whether he is willing to apply the passage and receive those of us who participate in the lectures as faithful brethren. Or, will he now seek to shelve and escape the passage?

Speaking for my self and others involved in the GOTF business, we are willing to work and worship with brethren as faithful saints who do not read *Truth Magazine*, do not purchase items from Truth Bookstore, and do not attend the Truth Lectures. Even if they do not approve of our legal status as an organization or do not approve of certain activities of this business, each of us is willing to receive them as faithful saints "that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 14:1; 15:6). We are serious and sincere in our commitment to practice what Romans 14-15 teaches. "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7).

No, those of us who are involved in the Truth Magazine Lectures are *not* pressuring anyone to attend, *not* alienating ourselves from those who abstain, and *not* causing division over this matter. The constant drumbeat of articles in *Gospel Truths* insisting that we cease and desist, and charging us with all sorts of

unscriptural and unscrupulous activities, is causing *confusion, tension, and a factional spirit* on the part of some brethren.

(My involvement in the Philippine work prevents me from offering to join brother Smith in a more extensive exchange of thoughts. I am making four trips per year and am preparing to go again within a few days. I trust that the materials already published by various brethren will provide sufficient resources for anyone wanting to study the subject more thoroughly.)

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Truth Magazine Lectures Announcement (By J.T. Smith)

The *Truth Magazine Lectures* (TML) will again be held in June of this year in Bowling Green, KY. Though brethren have begged members of the Guardian of Truth board to cease and desist the lectures (because of the division they are causing in the church) thus far it has been to no avail. Articles have been written pro and con, books have been published pro and con, but still the Truth Lectures (underwritten by the Guardian of Truth Foundation) continue.

Recently I have gone over a great deal of the material that has been written both pro and con. In my understanding of the Scriptures, the article on the front page of this addition of *Gospel Truths* by Ron Daly is exactly what I believe the passage teaches.

Last year at the TM Lectures brother Tom Roberts in his address at the Open Forum used Romans 14 to try to show that they had the LIBERTY to have their lectures. They continually attempt to put this entire thing on an individual basis even though it is underwritten by GOTF, an admitted HUMAN ORGANIZATION. If they are right in their contention they are wrong in their practice. They need to read Romans 15:1 which says, "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves." That being the case, I know of a number of brethren who are the "weak brethren" when it comes to the TML. Will they cease and desist? No, they are going to violate this Scripture and "please themselves."

Brother Ron Halbrook in his brief address at the Open Forum last year tried to show the Scripturalness of these efforts by citing Ecclesiastes 4:9 "Two are better than one. Because they have a good reward for their labor." This is clearly a passage taken out of context to try to prove that Paul and Silas; Aquila and Priscilla; Paul and Barnabas etc. etc., working together in teaching the gospel authorizes the Truth Magazine Lectures.

IF these brethren are correct (and that's a BIG IF) then the following conclusion is inevitable..
The church may support two people working together

The GOTF Lectures are comparable to two people working together
Therefore

The church may support the GOTF Lectures

This is the consequence of their doctrine whether they will admit it or not. Nuff said! - Editor
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