



Are We Biting and Devouring One Another?

Chris Reeves

I have seen in print recently and on more than one occasion the opinion stated that brethren today are biting and devouring one another as per Galatians 5:15. Some are claiming that controversies surrounding current issues, such as creation, fellowship, and marriage and divorce, are giving brethren the occasion to bite and devour one another. If this claim is true, then the brethren who are biting and devouring one another need to stop their actions and repent. However, if this claim is false, then the ones applying Galatians 5:15 to our current controversies need to stop misusing this passage. Are we biting and devouring one another? What does Galatians 5:15 teach?

The Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 5:15: “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.” To understand what Paul is warning against in this verse, one must go back and examine the immediate context. In the immediate context, Paul is contrasting walking by the flesh and walking by the Spirit. The contrast between flesh and Spirit begins in Galatians 5:13 and continues all the way to Gala-

tians 6:8. Beginning then in Galatians 5:13, Paul said that Christians are not to use their freedom in Christ (5:1) as “an occasion to the flesh.” They are not to live fleshly, wicked lives just because they are free from sin and the Law of Moses (compare 1 Pet. 2:16). How are they to live? Paul follows with a contrast. Note the word “but” in the latter part of verse 13: “but through love, be servants one to another.” The Galatians were not to live fleshly, wicked lives, “but,” they were to love and serve one another.

In Galatians 5:14, Paul goes on to explain that love is the foundation of their Christian duties toward others. Paul quotes Leviticus 19:18. Note the word “for” at the beginning of verse 14: “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Paul continues with verse 15. Again, note the word “but” at the beginning of the verse that sets forth a contrast: “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.” The Galatian brethren were to love and serve
see “Biting and Devouring” on p. 56

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Religious Elitism

Mike Willis

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:9-14).



Jesus addressed one of the issues particularly relevant to the Pharisees when he gave the parable mentioned above. On more than one occasion, the Pharisees attacked Jesus for intermingling with the common people, as the following passage shows:

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them (Luke 15:1-2).

Jesus was accused of intermingling with sinners (Matt. 9:11; Luke 5:30; 19:7). The Pharisees not only separated themselves from Gentiles, but also from those common folks in Israel who did not observe their oral laws about fasting, washings, etc. To the Pharisees, the ordinary men were beneath them. The Pharisees were spiritual elitists who looked down with scorn upon their brethren who were not so pious as they thought they were.

Spiritual elitist attitudes manifested themselves at Corinth. When the church had a member who had taken his father's wife, there were some who were "puffed up" about the matter (1 Cor. 5:2). I don't know the nature of the attitudes, but people who are proud think themselves superior to others. Perhaps they thought that their position on the grace of God (did they argue that the grace of God cleanses him even as he sins?) was superior to some legalists among them; whatever the nature of their feelings of superiority toward those who wanted to discipline the wayward and erring brother, they obviously felt superior to them. Then the tongue speakers thought themselves superior to other brethren who lacked that gift (see 1 Cor. 12-14).

Beware of the Danger

Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees should serve as a reminder to each one of *see "Elitism" on p. 57*

How Much Is Too Much?

Heath Rogers

The city of Chicago closed many of its beaches for a few days in late July. What would cause them to do such a thing in the midst of a very hot and humid summer? Apparently the beaches became a health hazard when the presence of the Ecoli bacteria reached a dangerous level. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, Ecoli is a bacteria that is found in the intestines of all vertebrates, including man. Its presence in water in certain quantities indicates pollution and can cause sickness. While people enjoy cooling off in the waters of Lake Michigan, no one enjoys getting sick.

I am glad that the city of Chicago was willing to take these unpopular measures to protect swimmers from the health hazard. But this idea of bacteria being at a “dangerous level” got me to thinking about something. Apparently, the Ecoli bacteria is *always* in that water. It’s just that certain weather conditions (lack of rain, no wind, and hot temperatures) caused the bacteria to multiply to a level where swimmers were at risk. The beaches are now clear for swimming, not because the water is free of the bacteria, but because the level of bacteria is low again.

I have never gone swimming in Lake Michigan, but it definitely doesn’t appeal to me now. Regardless of how low the bacteria content may be, it is still in there — which means I won’t be.

Let’s apply this principle to the local church. How much sin are we willing to tolerate among ourselves? Some Christians will use the above reasoning to justify the presence of sin in a church. They know it is there, but to them it is not at a dangerous level, so it is safe to proceed. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for allowing one in sin to remain in their fellowship. His reasoning was: “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6). Apparently, there is not a safe level of sin. If left uncorrected, the influence of that sinful member would have a disastrous effect upon the whole congregation. Sin can spread through a church just like bacteria through a lake.

A church also needs to be aware of the beliefs and practices of preachers whom they support and use in their gospel meetings. I have heard of churches inviting men who were not sound in the faith to participate in gospel efforts. When asked how they could use a man who knowingly teaches error on a particular subject, they respond by saying, “We asked him not to talk about that.” This may sound like a noble approach, but there are at least two problems with it:

For one thing, it simply isn’t good reasoning. You can’t invite a wolf into the flock and expect him not to devour some sheep, even if you try to

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muzzle him. This man may not preach his false views from the pulpit, but what is to stop him from doing so if he is asked a question about it in private? And how about the mixed message that the congregation is getting? All week long they hear the elders commend his lessons. As the meeting closes, he is praised, bid Godspeed, and perhaps even invited back to hold another meeting. The claim that, “We don’t agree with his teaching on _____” rings pretty hollow after an endorsement like that.

Secondly, this practice violates Scripture. Such an eldership is failing in their duty to protect the flock. Paul told Titus that elders were “to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Tit. 1:9-11). These are men “whose mouths must be stopped.” This is not accomplished by giving them the pulpit for a week. The works of darkness are to be exposed, not fellowshiped (Eph. 5:11).

How much false doctrine does a person have to teach before he is a false teacher? At what point will his error become too much for the church where you attend? The apostle John said, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 9-11). Apparently there is no safe level of error either. If a church brings in a man who teaches error, or who fellowshiped those in error, that church shares in his evil deeds.

Some have suggested that a man’s character is what makes him a false teacher, and we have been admonished to use the term correctly. “False Teacher” is a very damaging label to place upon someone. It can ruin a man’s influence

and effectiveness in the Lord’s kingdom, and thus, it should not be thrown around lightly. But if a man continues to teach error after he has been corrected, is it wrong for him to be identified as a false teacher?

What makes a person a false teacher: his character or his doctrine? Is a preacher only a threat if his intentions are bad? Paul’s enemies had bad intentions, yet they preached the truth. Paul rejoiced that Christ was preached, and he didn’t say anything about them being false teachers (Phil. 1:15-18). Is it safe to bring a man of good character into the church and give him the pulpit, regardless of what he teaches in it? If people believe and practice the error he teaches, will his character keep them out of hell? No. When error is taught souls are lost — regardless of the character of the one teaching it.

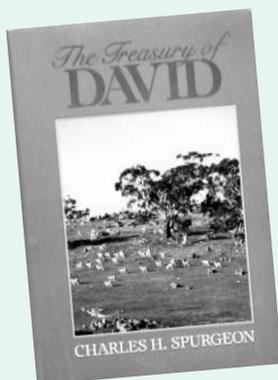
No one likes to hear their good friends called false teachers, but can you think of a better or more scriptural way to refer to one who teaches false doctrine? You know how the old saying goes: “If the shoe fits, wear it.” If people do not want their friends called “false teachers” they should encourage them to preach the truth. When we honor the reputation of our friends more than we do the truth of God’s word, and we care more about how they are treated than the souls they will lead astray, we will soon find our churches “swimming in the filth” of error. How much is too much?

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The Prayer of Jesus for the Unity of His Disciples

Lewis Willis

As the ministry of Jesus was concluding, with his death on the cross now near at hand, he assembled the disciples before the feast of Passover. At that feast he demonstrated humility in washing the feet of his disciples, and he told them that one of them would betray him. The disciples wondered who would do such a thing. Jesus exposed Judas as the culprit, and sent him forth to do his evil deed (John 13:1-30).

Then, Jesus gave a lengthy statement to the remaining disciples (John 13:31-16:33). Numbers of lessons were taught: To love God and others (13:34-35); to be comforted in their hope of heaven (14:1-3); to ask blessings of the Father in his name (14:13-14); to manifest their love for him by obeying his commandments (14:15); and to expect the Holy Spirit to come, teaching them the truth (14:26; 15:26; 16:7-11, 13). Any or all of these teachings would be worthy of consideration.

However, this brief article concerns *the prayer of Jesus* (John 17:1-26). Numbers of things are referred to in his prayer: He asked that God glorify him as he had glorified God (17:1); he said he had given God's word to his disciples (17:8); he asked God to "keep" his disciples from the evil one (17:11, 15); he prayed that his disciples would know "joy" in their lives (17:13); he prayed that God would sanctify the disciples through the truth, which is the Word of God (17:17); and *he prayed for the unity of his disciples* (17:20-21).

Here are the words of Jesus' prayer for the unity of his followers, and the content of that prayer applies to us today as it did to them:

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 (John 17:20-21).

Note these statements and petitions in that prayer:

1. He was praying not only for the apostles, but also for

succeeding generations of believers.

2. Faith in Jesus would come through the teaching of those disciples.
3. He prayed they would be "one," or united.
4. That unity is to be fashioned after the unity that existed between Jesus and the Father.
5. The presence of their unity would cause people to believe in the Lord.

This was a simple prayer. *He wanted his followers to be one or united.* This petition of Jesus, if observed by his disciples, would be revolutionary; it would change the world for all succeeding generations. Division, which produces unbelievers, would not be known in the world, if only his disciples would heed his prayer!

Unity is a consistent message of the Gospel. Not only was unity the prayer of Jesus, it was also the teaching of his disciples of the first century. To the church at Corinth, Paul wrote: "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. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. *Is Christ divided?* Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1:10-13). To the church at Rome Paul said, "Now I beseech you, brethren, *mark them which cause divisions and offences* contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17).

His Prayer Was Not To Be

Sadly, this simple prayer and message of Jesus and his apostles would not be fulfilled by his followers. Now note: *I am not talking about infidels, but about people who believe in him!* Believers in Jesus are not "one"; they are not united. In fact, the level of division that exists among his followers has reached staggering proportions. When I started preaching 42 years ago, it was commonly said that

Uncertain Theories of Origins

Paul K. Williams

The recent finding of what is described as a “humanoid” fossil in Chad dated by evolutionist methods at seven million years old and therefore the oldest “humanoid” fossil to date has thrown evolutionists into a turmoil. It is clear that their evolutionary theories of progression from ape to human are not correct. The journal *Nature* wrote: “New-found skull could sink our current ideas about human evolution” (John Whitfield, “Oldest member of human family found,” *Nature*, 11 July 2002). The conclusion, using the dating of the evolutionists themselves, has to be that a number of apes or ape-like animals which are now extinct lived in different places of the world. There is no evidence that they had anything to do with the “evolution” of humans.

A letter in *Time Europe Magazine*, July 8, 2002 from George Findlay, Kent, England caught my attention. He wrote: “Scientist Stephen Wolfram can write an equation for the orbit of a single planet, but not for an entire solar system or even a living cell [June 10]. I think I may be able to put Wolfram’s mind at rest. A single equation does not exist. *And Wolfram’s suggestion that science has been headed in the wrong direction for 300 years is an understatement.* Yet those who disregard science and seek a supernatural beginning are just crazy; there is a lot of rhetoric but no facts. Give me factual evidences. Let us put age, time and distance relating to the universe where they belong — on the shelf to gather dust” (Emphasis mine, PKW).

The prejudice of the evolutionist is easily seen in Findlay’s letter. The truth is that the evolutionist wants evolution to be true because he hates the idea of a God who created. The one who contends for a Creating God is “crazy,” although no theory of science concerning beginnings has any credence!

Factual evidence? The existence of the Bible is a *fact* which cannot be explained without God. And “since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). The universe is *fact*, and it shows in its every facet that there is a Creator with eternal power and divine nature.

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The Effect of Division

there were 250 different churches in America. That number has grown through the years: to 300, then 350, and 500. In 1980, *Good Housekeeping* magazine listed 1200 different churches in America. But, that was not enough. In 1989, *U.S. News and World Report*, citing a survey done in 1985, reported that there were over 24,000 different churches in the world, and that five new ones were being established every week!

Are we “one” as Jesus requested in his prayer? Hardly! Are we at all concerned about these divisions? If so, we have a peculiar way of showing that concern. No, we are not concerned; some even thank God for the diversity that lets men “choose the church of their choice.” Obviously, God doesn’t have a choice in this matter, only man! If God’s choice predominates, we would all be “one,” as Jesus prayed.

You will recall that the reason Jesus prayed for unity was that “*the world may believe that thou hast sent me*” (v. 21). The lesson is too obvious to miss. If *unity* convinces the world to believe in Jesus, *division* will produce unbelief. Have you ever seen a time in your life when there have been more unbelievers than we see and hear today? One can hardly engage in a serious religious discussion without someone saying he does not believe in Jesus or the Bible. This is the *effect* of ignoring the prayer of the Savior. The *message*? (1) We must all recognize our own roles in bringing about unity among believers. Are we united? (2) And, we must preach unity to the religious world around us. When and if we do, the world will come to believe in Jesus, unto the salvation of their souls and ours. Think about it!

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The Bible, Science, Skepticism, and Creation

Harry Osborne

When one reads the biblical

In the working of miracles, the natural laws of science do not constrain God. The Creator can act and has acted outside of the natural order. Science is helpless and useless in ascertaining the *how* of miraculous action.

account of creation and the numerous passages appealing to that account, he must admit the clarity of the literal interpretation of the creation account affirmed in Scripture. Those who reject the obvious and consistent appeal of God's word to the literal interpretation of the creation account do not find support from the Scripture to validate their view. Instead, they reject the clear teaching of the Bible in favor of supposed "scientific" evidence. They then place a forced reinterpretation on the Bible text so as to make it non-literal.

Thus, the current "scientific" interpretations of our day are used to change the plain text of Scripture. Many in the denominational world are doing the same thing with the reinterpretation of plain passages condemning homosexuality due to supposed "scientific" proof that sexual orientation is genetically determined rather than being a choice. In both cases, the supposed "scientific" evidence is in actuality neither *scientific* nor *evidence*. Such views are based upon interpretations and theories which do not fall within the realm of true scientific proof.

One young man from the Tampa area has taken this approach to its logical end in his opposition to those affirming the literal interpretation of the creation account. In the hope that the young man may yet be helped, his name is not being used. However,

his public statement justifying his stand exemplifies the logical end of a troubling and growing viewpoint. He said:

I believe that a strict literal interpretation of Genesis 1-2 combined with dogmatic Young Earth creationism must lead inevitably to a direct contradiction between the Bible and science. I don't believe that the Bible's authors were particularly concerned about history, chronology, and the age of the Earth. Old Testament Israel was too involved in the process of attempting to form a functioning society in a violent world to concentrate on questions regarding the origin and development of the Earth and human society.

Not only does this statement betray a rejection of the literal truth of the creation account, but it also explains the Bible's composition as originating from human authors with their historical and cultural limitations. The Bible clearly claims that the teaching in Scripture was the result of concepts, timing, and words chosen by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:6-13; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).

inspiration of Scripture — that the Bible believers accept the *verbal* words were chosen by God to convey the message as he desired. Bible believers accept the *plenary inspiration* of Scripture — that God's word is true in every matter it addresses (Pss. 119:128; 19:7-9; 93:5). When one tries to reinterpret the Scripture to fit "scientific" speculation, rather than the other

way around, he has a fundamental lack of faith in God's word that will only get worse. If one determines to believe no Bible passage which would conflict with present "scientific" observation and interpretation, he will eventually reject all accounts of miracles. Let us notice a few examples.

Hezekiah's Sun-Dial (2 Kings 20; Isa. 38)

During the reign of Hezekiah, Isaiah told the king that he would not recover from a grave illness, so he was to prepare for death. Hezekiah prayed to God that he might live. God responded to Hezekiah's prayer saying through Isaiah that Hezekiah would be given an additional fifteen years of life. To verify that word from God, Isaiah related the following:

And this shall be the sign unto thee from Jehovah, that Jehovah will cause the shadow on the steps, which is gone down on the dial of Ahaz with the sun, to return backward ten steps. So the sun returned ten steps on the dial whereon it was gone down (Isa. 38:7-8 cf. 2 Kings 20:8-11).

Can we explain scientifically how this could happen? Absolutely not! Do we still believe that it happened? Yes, without a doubt! Why? Because God said it happened through his word. If we try to explain such an event in scientific terms, we cannot do so. To suddenly stop the rotation of the Earth and make it rotate backwards momentarily and then reverse again to go in the original direction presents insurmountable problems. With the Earth spinning at about 1000 mph at the equator, the momentum problem simply cannot be solved in a scientific sense. If we say the event happened by the sun and the remainder of the universe being moved, the scientific problems only multiply. So how do we explain it? We do not attempt to reconcile science and the Bible. We merely believe the God who created the heavens and earth by speaking them into existence can also reshape that creation by the same power. *It is a*

miraculous action outside of the scope of scientific investigation.

Joshua's Stationary Sun (Joshua 10)

At the rescue of Gibeon, God caused the day to be lengthened so that the Israelites could fully defeat the Amorites. The text says:

Then spake Joshua to Jehovah in the day when Jehovah delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel; and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; And thou, Moon, in the valley of Aijalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, Until the nation had avenged themselves of their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stayed in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that Jehovah hearkened unto the voice of a man: for Jehovah fought for Israel (Josh. 10:12-14).

Just as in the above case of Hezekiah's time, we cannot explain in scientific terms the sun remaining in the same position relative to the Earth for a whole day. It is impossible by the natural laws of science. Does that mean the Bible record must be interpreted in a non-literal fashion? Absolutely not! It means we believe the historical account as given in the Bible because God said it. In the working of miracles, the natural laws of science do not constrain God. The Creator can act and has acted outside of the natural order. Science is helpless and useless in ascertaining the *how* of miraculous action.

Division of the Red Sea (Exodus 14)

When God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, he caused the Red Sea to divide for their passage. The text records that historical event in these words:

And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and Jehovah caused the sea to go back by a strong east

wind all the night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left (Exod. 14:21-22).

Can we reconcile the Bible account with the natural properties of water to explain how water could form a wall on either side of a dry path? No, it is impossible to explain such in scientific terms. Yet, by faith we accept that it happened by miraculous means just as God said it happened. When one requires a reinterpretation of the text to explain the event in natural or figurative terms, his real problem is a lack of faith.

Virgin Birth and Resurrection of Jesus

The New Testament makes the case for the divine nature and messianic place of Jesus on the basis of miraculous action which science holds impossible. In typical narrative form, the text says, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:18). Can we give a scientific explanation for such? No, nor do we try.

Paul stated as history the fact "that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Can we clarify the biological process by which that happened? No, for if we could, it would no longer serve as a divine proof of the authority of Jesus Christ as attested by God. That it is beyond the ability of physical law to explain is exactly the point! *Miracles are evidence from God to man for the precise reason that they do not conform to physical law, nor can they be reproduced or investigated by the scientific method.*

Conclusion

In matters pertaining to the miracu-

What Is the Social Gospel?

Richie Thetford

Have you ever asked yourself “what is the social gospel?” Most individuals who have been raised in the Lord’s church have come to know and understand what the social gospel is. There are many, many individuals in churches of Christ around the country today who are actively engaged in a social gospel religion. The social gospel is being preached in many churches today and is based on the “whole-man” concept. This means that man is made up of body, soul, and spirit and thus must have physical, mental, social, and spiritual training. While it is true that man needs education, we deny that the church is designed by the Lord to so operate.

The Purpose of the Church

The purpose of the Lord’s church (collectively) is to teach the Word of God. To understand this better we can look to the home. The design of the home is for domestic purposes, it is the purpose of the home to provide the material and physical needs of man. However the church has a different purpose for being in existence and that is to

provide for the spiritual mindedness of man. The church has never had as its design to train in psychological, mental, and physical training of man. Jesus had a mission when he came to earth and that was to seek and save the lost. He built his church (Matt 16:18), and taught that those that would come into the church would have the same responsibility in life, that is, to seek and save the lost (Matt 28:18f). It is true that a godly person may live longer, and be happier, yet it is not the purpose of the church (as an entity), to preach the social gospel. The church was not designed to be, or ever intended to be, a glorified health spa that includes gymnasiums, fellowship halls, etc. Where in the first century did the church engage in fun, food, and frolic? Christ’s church engaged one another in the preaching and teaching of the pure and simple gospel of Jesus Christ!

How Did It All Begin?

The social gospel is a term used by American historians to describe a socio-religious movement that came to America following the Civil War. It reached its climax in

lous action of God, we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). Any effort to reinterpret an historical account of one miracle into a non-literal form, so as to conform to scientific thought, is an assault to the foundation of faith (John 20:30-31). If such can be done with one narrative, it can be done to any narrative of a miracle. A century ago, that was the attempt of modernism. Post-modernist thought today is attempting much the same thing.

One might ask why we have taken much space in this paper to deal with present efforts to accommodate a non-literal interpretation of the creation account. The reason is simple — if we lose the battle for faith in the historical narrative of the creation, no historical narrative of a Bible miracle or event is safe from similar reinterpretation.

The lack of faith in the integrity of the Scripture began at the rejection of the literal nature of the creation account

in denominational seminaries long ago. Today, they have abandoned any pretense at believing in the Bible doctrine of inspiration, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Christ, or other fundamental truths of the Bible. Those making room for advocates of non-literal interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2, so as to incorporate the “Big Bang” and billions of years of naturalistic evolution in keeping with “scientific” theory, are taking the same path trod by denominationalists long before. *There is no more fundamental ground for which to contend than the very foundation of our faith.* Let us contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered by God and oppose the error which assaults it (Jude 3).

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the days just prior to World War I. America was emerging from a rural society and changing into an industrial country. It was moving so fast that little time was given to the social problems that were fast materializing. In the 1870s and 80s they realized they were faced with great social problems. The industrial revolution raised problems in business and political ethics. The employer-employee relationship was strained and the labor movement was to emerge. Poverty was everywhere and slums and drunkenness as well as prostitution and crime were on the increase as never before. Because of this, churches across the country decided it was their place to involve themselves into the social problems of the country. But one important thing was forgotten during all of this involvement and that was the very fact that the New Testament did not ever authorize a church to preach a social gospel. Can you find where they did? It can't be done. What you do find the church that Jesus built doing was preaching the Word of the Lord to the lost (Acts 2:44-47). They met daily in the Temple, ate together in their homes, and made sure that all the believers were taken care of. Who was taken care of? The believers, those who heard Peter's sermon, were pricked in their heart, repented and were baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).

The Social Gospel Failed in Denominationalism

I want you to carefully consider something for a moment. Let's just suppose that your neighbor utterly failed in a business, and you are thinking of going into that very same business. Wouldn't you check very carefully into his methods, marketing, and other operational procedures so that you would not make the same mistakes when you started your own business? Sure you would!

This is what has happened in the area of the social gospel in denominationalism. Denominationalism has utterly

failed in the saving of souls by the social gospel. Yet many churches today, including churches of Christ, are following right along in their footsteps. The social gospel failed to make people more spiritual. When you feed people, entertain them, and have social functions for them, you may create an atmosphere for good friends to know one another better, and that is good. But, it takes the gospel to save people. Romans 1:16 says: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." There is nothing wrong with hamburgers and ice cream, but when the church becomes engaged in such social practices, they are prostituting the mission of the church which Jesus designed and built. The Lord's church is neither a glorified soup line nor is it a country club to entertain its members.

Many people in churches of Christ today have seen the social gospel creep into their midst over the past 40 to 50 years. Even though they know that these practices are wrong, as far as the church is concerned, they have continued to accept these worldly practices. I would encourage every religious person to wake up and look at what the church is doing where you attend. Do as the Bereans and "search the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). If things are being practiced that are not in accordance with New Testament authorization, then seek to find the church that is practicing only those things which are authorized in the New Testament! May God grant all of us the wisdom to recognize error, turn from that error, and serve him in all purity.

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Years of Digressions, Dissensions, and Divisions (15)

Bill Cavender

In the December 9, 1954, issue of the *Gospel Advocate*, Nashville, Tennessee, on the editorial page, brother B.C. Goodpasture reproduced a letter from “a faithful brother who has stood like a stone wall against innovations and false doctrines. He has been persecuted for ‘righteousness sake.’” The editor admonished readers to “Study carefully what he writes. He is not alone in the *treatment* he suggests for those who disturb the churches with their hobbies.” The letter follows:

“Dear Brother Goodpasture:

“For a considerable length of time many members of the church believed the controversy would soon end over the question of the attitude our congregations should assume toward supporting orphan homes and radio programs in cooperation with other congregations and no serious results would follow. However, we were mistaken.

“It now appears to me and to others that instead of coming to an end, the cleavage grows more pronounced and another dangerous division, similar to the ‘premillennial’ division, is sure to come unless a strong and aggressive specific attack is made upon the theories and methods of those men who are responsible for this threatened division. The exposure of such men may yet prevent many congregations from being disturbed and divided.

“Premillennialism was practically stopped when those responsible for teaching and pressing their hurtful theories were publicly ‘quarantined.’

“I trust you will not consider me presumptuous if I suggest that perhaps the writers for the *Gospel Advocate* might wisely spearhead a movement to ‘quarantine’ those preachers who today are sowing the seeds of discord among the brotherhood and to thus prevent further divisions.

“Kindly give to this suggestion your serious and prayerful consideration.

Fraternally,” . . .

The writer of this letter to the *Advocate* was never identified. Many challenges were made to the editor to name this anonymous letter writer, but to no avail. Many brethren were of the opinion that brother Goodpasture, himself, was the author. Whether or not he was, the letter did reflect his attitude toward brethren. His subsequent actions, the remainder of his life, toward his brethren in stifling discussion, vilifying honest and conscientious Christians, and using the *Advocate* to promote divisions in the churches and the “quarantine” of faithful brethren, were abundantly demonstrated. At that time he was probably “the one most powerful man” in churches of Christ, controlling and using a paper which a short while later had almost 100,000 subscribers. It was, by far, the most highly circulated and widely read, influential paper among brethren, especially east of the Mississippi River. The most widely circulated and read paper in the west was *The Firm Foundation* in Austin, Texas, then edited by brother G.H.P. Showalter. Its clientele and influence never rivaled that of the *Advocate*.

There are three other letters from brethren on this page of this issue of the *Advocate*: (1) From Allen Phy, preacher in Union City, Tennessee, highly commending a letter in the November 18 issue, written by “a well-known elder,” anonymously, who recommended that preachers be dealt with who opposed the orphan homes and the centralization of local church funds and work under “sponsoring,” centralized elderships. (2) “Another brother, who labors with a growing church in the deep South,” who remained anonymous, wrote commending brother Goodpasture for printing this un-named elder’s letter in the November 18 issue and stated his agreement. (3) From Ira North, Madison,

Tennessee, saying, "I would like to commend the thought-provoking and timely article entitled 'An Elder Writes' (Nov. 18). It should cause our young preaching brethren to think twice before devoting their energy and talents to causing confusion and division. It should encourage us all to determine to be missionary, not divisionary, builders not wreckers, assets to the cause of Christ not liabilities." Not knowing the future, Goodpasture nor any others of the digressive programs and movements of the fifties could have envisioned what Ira North would do with the Madison church! If ever there was a man who contributed to doctrinal softness and compromise, liberalism, and departures from New Testament patterns for the Lord's churches, it was Ira!

In this same issue of the *Advocate*, there was printed a lengthy article by brother Cecil N. Wright of Denver, Colorado, entitled "Revived Sommerism." He defines "Sommerism" thus: "The term has been applied to certain religious philosophies championed and made hobbies of by Daniel Sommer (now deceased), and/or his sons, but never accepted by the brotherhood as a whole. These philosophies were, among other things, anti-Christian college, anti-orphan home, anti-located preacher, and pro-evangelistic authority. . . . History, however, has a way of repeating itself. And it is doing so now, with a 'revived Sommerism' developing right in our midst."

Wright continues writing of "revived Sommerism," saying: "Its headquarters are in our Southland, where the old-line Sommerism never successfully invaded; and its leaders are capable men. Some of them enjoyed almost universal esteem in the church because of their reputation for soundness in the days before they took up with and began to press their hurtful hobbies. Therefore they have close personal friends and followers and ready access throughout the brotherhood, making it easy for them to sow their seeds of discord and hobbyism, and causing opposition to them to be somewhat a peril to the reputation of whoever dares it. Many brethren, knowing their reputation for soundness in the past, can hardly conceive of their being off the beam now. And, indeed, they are not on everything. But they use their loyalty on other matters, as well as their previously earned reputation, to open the way for their hobbies, which they promote with great industry and with such artful sophistry and dogmatism that many persons are deceived by them, and not a few are at least

confused. . . . Many able brethren are reluctant to tangle with them, not because they cannot meet their arguments, but because they wish to avoid the muss."

He continues: "This 'revived Sommerism' is anti-Bible college, anti-located preacher, and anti-orphan home and old folk's home." Two papers of brethren are mentioned, *Bible Talk* in Dallas, anti-college and anti-located preacher, and *The Gospel Guardian* in Lufkin, Texas, which "does not go along with *Bible Talk* on the particular phases of *Sommerism* just mentioned — not all the way against Christian colleges, and not at all against located preachers. But it is highly rabid anti-orphan home and old folk's home, some of its writers being vehemently against one sort of set-up, some against another kind, and others against everything but a private home."

By November-December 1954, there were three main issues of controversy and discussion: (1) The scripturalness of local churches of Christ supporting, maintaining and subsidizing human agencies and institutions, such as orphans homes (although few if any such "homes" had inmates who were *really* orphans, and homes for aged people whose families could not or would not care for them. (2) The centralizing of the local churches' work and monies into and under the control and oversight of "sponsoring, centralized elderships and churches," exemplified and illustrated by "The Herald Of Truth" world-wide radio program which had begun in Abilene, Texas, under the auspices and oversight of the elders of the Highland Avenue church. (This was not the only program of this kind among churches, nor were the Highland elders the only "sponsoring" eldership among the churches.) This radio program was begun in 1951-1952. It involved the Highland elders begging funds from hundreds and thousands of local congregations to do a work which was beyond their ability, oversight, and resources. They ceased, in this program and principle, to be elders of a local congregation and became "universal, world-wide" overseers of a universal, world-wide work and program. The television facet of the Herald of Truth was begun later, involving much more begging of money, with regional and state representatives being organized by the Highland elders, who would visit and ask local churches throughout the USA for cooperation with and monies for the Herald of Truth. (3) The scripturalness of local churches of Christ supporting, maintaining, and

subsidizing schools and colleges operated by our brethren. Individuals and local churches did not, generally, support, nor believe in supporting the school and colleges. These “issues” began to be discussed openly and generally in the late forties and into the fifties.

But, then, brother N.B. Hardeman made the argument publicly, and other prominent brethren began to argue and write likewise, consistently so, that if the local congregations could support the orphans home they could support the school, as both types of such eleemosynary agencies are chartered, authorized, and legalized under the same civil laws of the respective states in the USA. This immediately led to the many debates, discussions, writing, and arguments about “supporting the orphans homes.” It became immediately a divisive, emotional, prejudicial problem. Truth and fruitful discussion on the nature of God’s eternal kingdom, the work and organization of true churches of Christ, vital Bible themes and principles, were obscured and lost in the maze of inflamed sermons, writings, passions, and accusations. Lines of fellowship were quickly drawn on those who “did not believe in caring for orphans and old folks,” who would “let the orphans starve,” who “did not believe in preaching the gospel to the lost,” who “were lacking entirely in the milk of human-kindness,” who “cared only for themselves and no one else,” prejudicial words and pratings against those terrible “antis,” who were against everything except their own weekly pay checks!

In my memory and in my judgment (without consulting and re-reading all those old papers of that precise period of time; they are in boxes in our attic in Murfreesboro, I subscribed to and read all of the papers of the brethren for years, and saved them), those writings in the *Gospel Advocate* in November-December 1954, precipitated a wholesale division among brethren and churches, and was the catalyst for name-calling, impugning of motives and twisting of words and misrepresentations of brethren, arguments, debates, hard-feelings, misunderstandings, bitter strife and alienations. Suspicions abounded, long-time friends became enemies, families were separated, churches divided, respected preachers were maligned and “fired,” gospel meetings were canceled. Those were tragic, sad, heart-rending, distressful days for all of us who were involved. Convictions and conscience, the love of God and of the truth as it is in Jesus, compelled us to speak and teach and write.

The *Advocate* began “a full court press” against the “antis.” Their “ace writers,” as Guy N. Woods, G.C. Brewer, Sterl A. Watson, W.L. Totty, Cecil N. Wright, and many others continually wrote against the truth, arguments, articles, reasonings, and appeals of the “anti-brethren.” Two brethren of great reputation and soundness resigned from the *Advocate* staff of writers: Challen Dewey Plum (C.D. Plum), and later Roy H. Lanier, Sr. The *Gospel Guardian*

and its writers bore the brunt of these attacks and misrepresentations. Other papers began, as *Searching the Scriptures*, *The Preceptor*, *Truth Magazine*, etc. on the national level. Great men arose to earnestly contend for the faith: Foy E. Wallace, Jr. at the first, but who later ceased to help in the conflict for truth due to his personal differences with some brethren, Roy E. Cogdill, Yater Tant, W. Curtis Porter, Luther Blackmon, A.C. Grider, Cecil B. Douthitt, James R. Cope, James W. Adams, A. Hugh Clark, H.E. Phillips, Connie W. Adams, Paul Foutz, Roy Foutz, James P. Needham, James P. Miller, Franklin T. Puckett, Leslie Diestelkamp, Gordon Pennock, Floyd Thompson, Raymond Harris, Johnie Edwards, H. Osby Weaver, Ernest A. Finley, Cecil Willis, W.R. Jones, Paul Brock, Charles A. Holt, Jr. (in his early years did some outstanding work and writing) — these are a few of the many who “came to the help of Jehovah” in the times of need. These and many, many, many more faithful and capable men arose all over the country to lift up the royal banner of King Jesus. Hundreds of faithful and true churches took a stand for the truth against all innovations. Many new congregations began as brethren separated themselves from the many errors which were being preached and practiced by programmed, progressive, digressive elders and preachers. Many lovers of truth were forced out of congregations which they had supported and helped to build over many years. Hundreds of church bulletins and papers were begun and mailed to everyone who would read and study. (In Port Arthur, Texas, where Marinel and I lived for seventeen years, we mailed out a monthly, eight-page paper, at one time having up to five thousand names and addresses on our mailing list.) Many, many people were taught the truth, they stood up and were counted on the side of righteousness, and many churches were salvaged from the clutches of error and evil.

Those were truly days and times of testings and trials. Many preachers and elders, who had talked and written a good case prior to “crunch time” remained silent, some recanted, many loved position and income more than truth, and went against everything they had previously said and taught. Many, many “rode the fence” and fell on the wrong side with the majority. But a faithful remnant was preserved. Now we witness many of those churches, born in times of great conflict, being given over to doctrinal softness, compromising spirits, led by a new generation of brethren and preachers who know not the sacrifices which brought them into existence, and are traveling the same roads to apostasy which were traveled by the majority of our brethren fifty years ago. (To be continued)

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The Yellow Tag of Quarantine

Cecil B. Douthitt

Sincere brethren in Christ hold divergent views on religious questions. A few of these brethren clearly indicated lately that they do not want to continue to fellowship those who disagree with them on some of the issues that are disturbing the churches.

One suggested in the *Gospel Advocate* of December 9, that we start pinning the yellow tag of quarantine on one another. Here are his words:

I trust you will not consider me presumptuous if I suggest that perhaps the writers for the *Gospel Advocate* might wisely spearhead a movement to quarantine those preachers who today are sowing seeds of discord among the brotherhood and to thus prevent further division.

This statement was given space on the editorial page of the *Advocate*.

What would be the result, if the writers and friends of the *Gospel Advocate* did “spearhead a movement to quarantine” one another? The church would split into a dozen warring factions. There would be a five-way split in the *Gospel Advocate* itself; for its writers hold views that are as opposite as the poles. Here, I shall point out only a few of the factions that would spring up as separate and distinct units:

Faction No. 1. Great and good men like G.K. Wallace, Flavil Colley and scores of others believe that orphan homes, homes for the aged, and other eleemosynary institutions that receive contributions from church treasuries should be put under the control of an eldership; that those not under an eldership are parallel to a missionary society. They argue that “There is a parallel between an orphans’ home that has a board of trustees other than the elders of the church to do the work of the church, and the United Christian Missionary Society.” Gayle Oler, G.C. Brewer, Guy Woods and many other writers and friends of the *Gospel Advocate* believe that G.K. Wallace is in error in statement. When Oler, Brewer, Woods and others hang the yellow tag of quarantine on all who are contending that church supported charity organizations must be under an eldership, then we will have a fully developed **Faction No. 1.**

Faction No. 2. A few of the writers and friends of the

Advocate are contending that all child-caring facilities that have been made a part of the organizational set-up of a church are neither desirable nor scriptural. Brother Gayle Oler has been swinging some tough blows at Lubbock and Tipton in recent issues of the *Boles Home News*. Among other things, he hurls this question:

But why should anyone deem it to be necessary or to be even desirable that any child-caring facility, public or private, be a part of the organizational set-up of the New Testament church when it is obvious that there was no such organizational set-up in the New Testament.

Is Brother Oler a hobby-rider? Is he a “church buster”? Should he be quarantined? He is shaking his fist at all the good men in Group No. 1, and he has more bitter words in his vocabulary than any gospel preacher I know; if he keeps hurling them, he certainly will disturb Broadway in Lubbock. Does the *Advocate* quarantiner think it is time now to hang the yellow tag on Gayle, or should we wait till he gets in another punch or two at Lubbock and Tipton?

Of course Brother Oler knows “there was no such organizational set-up in the New Testament” as his church supported “child-caring facility” which is not under an eldership, and yet he thinks his “facility” is necessary, desirable and scriptural.

Just how hot the fight will wax between those who hold the views expressed by G.K. Wallace, and those who hold the views expressed by Gayle Oler, no man knows. But we do know, if they follow the suggestion of the *Advocate* editorial, and pin yellow tags of quarantine on each other, then the fur will fly.

I do not consider either of these groups to be a faction and I have no intention of participating in a quarantine of either, and I hope that brethren Wallace and Oler do not quarantine each other.

Faction No. 3. Another faction that would develop, if the *Advocate* writers “spearhead a movement to quarantine those preachers” whom they call obnoxious creed makers, would consist of those brethren who think that both Gayle

and G.K. are wrong; those brethren who think it is scriptural and right for churches to include child-caring facilities in their “organizational set-up” as in Broadway in Lubbock, and that it is scriptural and right to donate funds from church treasuries to child caring organizations not under an eldership, such as Boles Home.

Some of the *Advocate* writers are saying some stout words about all the brethren who agree with either G.K. Wallace or Gayle Oler. Guy Woods and Cecil Wright say that he who holds to one of these plans and opposes the other has:

. . . abandoned the role of a believer and assumed that of a legislator. He is presuming to speak where God has not spoken. He is engaged in the business of creed-making. And, his course is no less obnoxious, because his creed is unwritten, or because he is one of the brethren.

Are Guy and Cecil ready to hang the yellow tag of quarantine on G.K. and Gayle? If they do, we cannot expect G.K. and Gayle to do less than hang the same tag on Guy and Cecil, then they all will be quarantined.

Faction No. 4. A few brethren teach that church donations to Bible colleges are scriptural. Occasionally, one in this group gets all wrought up and calls the brethren who disagree with him, “half-baked Sommerites,” “Johnnys come lately,” and many other unbrotherly appellations.

If the advice of the *Advocate* editorial is followed, then N.B. Hardeman, G.C. Brewer, Sterl Watson and all who think it is scriptural for churches to give money from their treasuries to Bible colleges must hang the yellow tag of quarantine on James Cope, Cecil Douthitt, L.R. Wilson, Rex Turner, E.R. Harper and all who teach that it is unscriptural for churches to contribute to Bible colleges. Then we must hang the quarantine tag on Hardeman, Brewer and all who teach as they do on this question. Then we all will be duly tagged, branded, labeled and quarantined, and brethren everywhere can tell at a glance to which faction each belongs.

Time would fail me, if I should tell of the warring factions that would result from a quarantining of brethren who hold different views on centralized oversight, remote control, ecumenical institutions for brotherhood action and a dozen other issues that are with us always.

I do not believe that the groups described above are factions yet; I have set forth merely what I think would result, if we start a disfellowshipping campaign among ourselves.

This business of quarantining one another is a game that more than one can play “at.” It might turn out to be a

boomerang. The evangelist, or elder, or editor, who undertakes to hang a yellow tag of quarantine on all who do not agree with him, might return home with more quarantine tags hanging on his own coat tail than he was able to pin on others.

For example, how many churches would invite E.R. Harper, James Cope or Cecil Douthitt to come among them, if they thought we would try to quarantine every one we met, who did not agree with us that it is unscriptural for churches to give money to Bible colleges? During the past six months, I have had more invitations for meetings, received more letters asking if I would consider working permanently with other churches, and bigger financial offers, than I have ever had during any other six month period in the forty years that I have been trying to preach. These brethren who invited me know just where I stand on everything, and some of them do not agree with me on some things; but I do not think any of them would want me, if I went about advocating a quarantining of brethren on issues that do not justify a severance of fellowship. Some issues do justify it; but these issues do not yet.

Yes, this thing could be a boomerang. I remember reading somewhere of a man named Haman who built a gallows fifty cubits high on which to hang Mordecai. Haman thought that he was so strong and influential that he could treat the other fellow any way he wished, and get away with it. “And Haman recounted unto them the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king.” So, with a feeling of absolute security Haman made that gallows. But “they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.” God had a way of making that thing backfire, and Haman himself “got it in the neck.”

Somewhere I remember reading of a Pharisee who trusted in himself that he was righteous, “and set all others at nought.” But Jesus said that this man and all others like him “shall be humbled.” I believe Jesus meant it; I believe his warnings; I believe his promises. The Lord has a way of giving all Hamans and all self-righteous people a dose of their own medicine.

There is not a religious paper of any size among us, whose writers agree on everything. And if any editor thinks his paper is so mighty and influential that he can launch a quarantine campaign against all who do not agree with him on the way the churches should do their work, and not produce a multiple split among his own supporters, just let him launch it, and learn the hard way. Haman thought he was mighty, influential and secure. But his neck was no harder for God to break, than the neck of a mouse.

Quarantine or suppression or an iron curtain is not the

“You’re Driving People Away”

John Isaac Edwards

As we write in the newspapers, the bulletins, the religious journals, and speak from time to time and place to place, we are often met with individuals, both within and without the body of Christ, who disagree with our teaching, do not appreciate the way we present the Scriptures, and say, “You’re not winning people to the Lord. You’re driving people away.” We want to give some space to this accusation brought against us.

1. Was the Lord driving people away? If you had lived during the time of Christ, would you have charged the Lord with driving people away? Was the Lord driving people away when he said, “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things?” (Matt. 12:34)? When the Lord accused men of transgressing the commandment of God, making the commandment of God of none effect, called them hypocrites, and charged them with vain worship (Matt. 15:1-9), was he driving them away? When the disciples came to him and said, “Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?” (Matt. 15:12), do you think the Lord should have been concerned about driving them away? Jesus answered, “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind” (Matt. 15:14).

2. Was Peter driving people away? If you had been present on the day of Pentecost as the first recorded gospel sermon was being preached by Peter, would

you have accused him of driving people away? When Peter charged his audience with the guilt of crucifying the Son of God (Acts 2:23, 36), would you have said, “You better tone it down, Peter. You need to find a kinder, gentler, smoother way of presenting the gospel to these people, Peter. You’re going to drive them away, Peter!”? Peter’s proclamation of the gospel of Christ was of such a nature that it made people aware of their sin, that they needed to do something to get rid of the sin in their lives, and what is was they needed to do (Acts 2:37-38), and “they that gladly received his word were baptized . . . And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:41, 47).

There are those who gladly receive the word, and then there are those who madly receive it. The reaction of men and women to the preaching of the truth is not based so much upon the presentation of the preacher as it is the reception of the hearer. When we speak the truth in love as the Lord and the apostles, we are not driving people away from the truth. It is their own evil heart that keeps them from coming to the truth! I wonder, are you concerned about driving us away, when you accuse us of driving away?

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solution to our problems as they exist at this time; nor are all these things combined the solution. The only right course is the one pursued by the brethren as recorded in Acts 15. They engaged in an open and honorable discussion of the issue that troubled them. Speeches were made by men on both sides. There was “much questioning,” and this “much questioning” was not done by one side only. No one was suppressed. When every body had had his say, James made a speech and read Amos 9:11,12, and that determined the matter. The issue was settled by the truth of God’s word as it appeared in Amos 9:11,12, and not by quarantine, iron curtain or suppression of brethren who were sincere

and wanted to be heard. Why can’t we settle our differences the same way? Why can’t we meet in honorable and orderly discussion, and settle our differences by the truth of God’s word, as our brethren did in Jerusalem nineteen hundred years ago? The truth never suffers in honorable discussion. The truth itself is antidote to all the poisonous error presented in debate. Isn’t our history since Pentecost an everlasting monument to that fact?

Come now, and let us reason together, saith Jehovah (Isa. 1:18.)

Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit and Sinful Remarriages

Joe R. Price

From time to time brethren study and discuss what constitutes blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Some are basing their

erroneous conclusions about sin, repentance, salvation, and divorce and remarriage upon mistaken notions surrounding such blasphemy. Therefore, it is important and practical to our faith in Christ that we understand this subject within the context and framework of inspired Scripture and not the unstable structure of human wisdom (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; Col. 2:3-4).

“Could this be the son of David?”

The presence of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus of Nazareth is an identifying mark that he is the Messiah. God’s prophet Isaiah predicted in Isaiah 42:1-4.

Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands shall wait for His law.

Matthew quoted and applied this Messianic prophecy to Jesus in Matthew 12:15-21. Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit was with Jesus as he “healed them all” (Matt. 12:15). Thus, an evidence that Jesus is the Messiah was given to men by means of his miraculous healings (cf. John 20:30-31).

The people were concluding, upon the basis of his miraculous powers, that Jesus must be the Messiah. Those who witnessed his miracles were grasping the impact of what his power implied. So, when Jesus healed a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute the people wondered aloud, “could this be the Son of David?” (Matt. 12:22-23). Truly, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38). The Spirit of God was with Jesus as he healed (cf. Luke 4:18; 5:17). The Messiah was among men.

But, not everyone accepted this miraculous evidence that Jesus is the Son of David, the Messiah. The Pharisees opposed all linkage between the power of Jesus to cast out demons and the Messianic claim it supported. “This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons” was their response (Matt. 12:24). They rejected the presence and power of the Spirit of God by attributing the works of Jesus to Beelzebub (the prince of demons, see Mark 3:22). Unable to deny that a miracle had occurred, they cunningly ascribed to Jesus diabolical rather than divine power. By so doing, they called the Spirit of God the Spirit of Satan!

Jesus demolished their false charge by first showing that a house divided against itself cannot stand (Matt. 12:25; Mark 3:23-26). Then, he exposed their hypocritical inconsistency by wondering out loud what power was behind the exorcisms performed by their sons (Matt. 12:27)!

Jesus confidently affirmed that the source of his miraculous casting out of demons was divine. This was evidence that the kingdom of God was among them (cf. Matt. 12:17-21; Isa. 42:1-4; 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19; Mark 1:14-15). By casting out demons Jesus gave ample evidence of his power over Satan (Matt. 12:29). This evidence should compel the honest of heart to follow him (Matt. 12:30).

In Matthew 12:31-32 Jesus shows the depth and problem of the Pharisees’ sin:

Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

Why is it said that blasphemy against the Son of Man may be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven? One thing is certain: It is not because of any difference in the deity and holiness of the Son and the Spirit (John 1:1-3, 14; Col. 2:9; Acts 5:3-4).

Rather, it is because Jesus makes a sequential argument. The person who speaks against the Son of Man may yet have his heart turned by the evidence given by the Holy Spirit that Jesus is the Christ, and in so turning, be saved (cf. Acts 2:4, 36-41; Tit. 3:3-7). However, the person who speaks against the Holy Spirit (by opposing the miraculous evidence from the Spirit that Jesus is the Messiah) rejects the very basis for faith and forgiveness! There will be no more evidence than what the Spirit of God has given that Jesus is the Christ (cf. Heb. 2:3-4; Mark 16:17-20). Therefore, the person who rejects this evidence is guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and “will not be forgiven” (for without faith being established there can be no forgiveness, Matt. 12:32; Mark 16:16).

As long as a person continues to oppose, reject, and blaspheme the Spirit-given evidence that Jesus is the Christ, he will not be forgiven. J.W. McGarvey correctly observes:

But blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is in its nature an eternal sin, for if one rejects the evidence given by the Holy Spirit and ascribes it to Satan, he rejects the only evidence upon which faith can be based; and without faith there is no forgiveness. The difference in the two sins is therefore in no way due to any difference in the Son and Spirit as to their degrees of sanctity or holiness. The punishment is naturally eternal because the sin is perpetual (*The Fourfold Gospel* 303).

The Pharisees who described the Spirit of God as “unclean” were guilty of such a sin, and as long as they continued to reject the miraculous, divine evidence they would never be forgiven: “He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation” — because they said, “He has an unclean spirit” (Mark 3:29-30).

Whenever a person opposes and blasphemes the divinely given evidence that Jesus is the Christ he has rejected all the evidence the Spirit of God will ever give him that Jesus is the Christ. How shall he escape condemnation for such rejection? He will not (Heb. 2:3-4). By continuing to practice blasphemy against the Holy Spirit he “never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation” (Mark 3:29). When one continues to practice sin he will not be forgiven of that sin.

Is it scriptural to conclude there is one particular sin God will never forgive? No, because every sinner who will believe, repent, and turn to the Lord will be saved — including the blasphemer (Acts 11:21). God’s power to save is never diminished nor is his mercy abated (Isa. 59:1-2, cf. Luke 15:24). Should even a blasphemer come to believe the evidence that Jesus is the Christ, repent of his blasphemy and obey the gospel, we are confident he too will be saved by the mighty hand of God (Isa. 59:1-2). Momentarily, we will consider an example of this very thing.

Forgiveness Never Available?

Some brethren teach that forgiveness is never available nor applied once the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is committed. They say one has committed the sin which will never be pardoned (i.e., the “unpardonable sin”). Extrapolating from their mistaken notion that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit “can never be forgiven,” they then conclude that every other sin can be forgiven, including unlawful remarriages. Therefore (according to their line of reasoning), people can continue in unscriptural remarriages when they obey the gospel with the assurance that God forgives them and accepts them in that remarriage (Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:10-11). These brethren are teaching people that God forgives them in spite of their ongoing sin of adultery.

We do not deny that the adultery of unlawful remarriages can be forgiven. Indeed, it can be and will be whenever the sinner repents and ceases his practice of sin (Acts 26:20; Rev. 9:20-21). However, we strenuously deny that the Lord allows those in adulterous remarriages to continue in their adultery after becoming Christians, by somehow suggesting that forgiveness means their sin is no longer sin!

Blasphemy is still blasphemy after baptism, and if the blasphemer does not repent he will die in his sin (Ezek. 18:4). Adultery is still adultery after baptism, and if the adulterer does not repent he will die in his sin (Ezek. 18:4). God’s will both for the blasphemer and the adulterer (as well as all other sinners) is “that he should turn from his ways and live” (Ezek. 18:23, 32). Like the Ephesians who burned their books to end all association with their previous sin, the adulterer must cease his adulterous association (Acts 19:18-20). God has never offered a sinner any assurance of forgiveness when the sinner continues to practice his sin, including the sin of adultery (Matt. 19:9; 1 John 3:4-10; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Eph. 4:20-24; Rom. 6:1-2). Repentance necessitates that sin cease. Those who continue to practice sin have not repented of it (Rev. 9:20-21).

Blasphemy and Forgiveness

It is a strange and perverted exegesis of Scripture which concludes there is one sin God will never forgive (blasphemy against the Holy Spirit) even when the sinner repents and obeys the gospel, yet there is another sin God will allow the sinner to continue practicing even though he has not repented of it! This is not the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42)! Such a view of sin and forgiveness perverts Scripture and gives false assurance to those who continue to practice sin (2 Pet. 3:16; Gal. 1:6-9).

Are these brethren suggesting that a person who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never repent (change his mind), can never believe that Jesus is the Christ, and can never obey the gospel unto the saving of his soul? If so, then these brethren must necessarily conclude the gospel is

powerless to convert some sinners. Yet, the gospel retains its full power to save “everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). These brethren have reached a false conclusion concerning blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in a futile attempt to justify unscriptural remarriages. As a result, they diminish the power of the gospel to save the lost!

Are we to believe that there is one group of sinners who cannot call upon the name of the Lord and be saved? “For whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13). According to these brethren, calling on the name of the Lord and being saved is unattainable by those who have once blasphemed against the Holy Spirit. But, the evidence of inspired Scripture shows that even one who blasphemes the Spirit of God can be converted by the power of the gospel and call upon the name of the Lord.

Saul the Blasphemer

Saul of Tarsus was a blasphemer before his conversion (1 Tim. 1:13). He did many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, including consenting to the death of Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1). You may recall that Stephen’s murder was precipitated when he accused Saul and his cohorts of always resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). Always resisting the Holy Spirit is certainly “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” Saul was guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as long as he resisted the Spirit-provided evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (cf. John 16:8-15).

But, Saul was forgiven of his blasphemy against the Holy Spirit when he repented, believed, and obeyed the gospel. Saul the blasphemer was told to “arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16)! What some brethren say cannot be done did indeed happen!

If blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven, regardless of the blasphemer’s belief, repentance, and obedience to the gospel, then the conversion and apostleship of Paul was all a sham! His conversion was a fraud! What is more, the Lord deceived him into thinking he was forgiven when he never could be!

If those who hold the view that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven reject this conclusion when it is applied to Saul, they have just given up their false position, and we applaud them for it! Any view of this subject that prevents a sinner from repenting and being saved is false. Jesus Christ “is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (1 Tim. 4:10).

Practicing Sin

Any sin one continues in will not be forgiven, whether it is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit or the sin of adultery due to an unscriptural remarriage. Sin which one continues to practice is a “sin leading to death” (1 John 5:16-17).

Truly, “how shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Rom. 6:2).

Any sinner who does not repent of his sin “will not be forgiven.” Please note: (1) The *blasphemer* who persists in (will not repent of but continues to practice) his blasphemy will not be forgiven of his blasphemy (“it will not be forgiven him,” Matt. 12:32). But, the blasphemer who will repent and reform will be saved. Saul of Tarsus, the previously Holy Spirit blasphemer, is proof of that (1 Tim. 1:12-16; Acts 26:15-20). (2) The *drunkard* who persists in (will not repent of but continues to practice) his drunkenness will not be forgiven of his sin of drunkenness (Gal. 5:21). (3) The *polygamist* who persists in (will not repent of but continues to practice) his polygamy will not be forgiven of his sin of polygamy (Rom. 7:2-3; Matt. 19:4-6). (4) The *adulterer* who persists in (will not repent of but continues to practice) his adultery will not be forgiven of his sin of adultery (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Heb. 13:4).

Repentance does not change the nature of sin, but changes the heart and life in respect to practicing the sin. Thus, a marriage which is adultery before baptism is still adultery after baptism (Matt. 19:9). For forgiveness to be applied the practice of sin — including the practice of adultery — must cease (Rom. 6:1-4; cf. Luke 3:8-14). Those who continue to practice adultery after being baptized do not have forgiveness in spite of their sin. There is no hope of salvation for the person who, upon being baptized, continues to allow sin to reign in his mortal body (Rom. 6:11-12). But that is exactly what happens when one remains in the sin of adultery after becoming a Christian.

God’s forgiveness of our sins is a wonderful, glorious thing! We lessen the value of forgiveness and fail to properly esteem God’s mercy whenever we redefine forgiveness to imply that one can continue in sin that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1)! To teach people they can remain in unlawful remarriages with God’s approval and forgiveness cheapens God’s forgiveness, nullifies the demands of repentance, and deceptively says “peace, peace” when there is no peace.

Conclusion

God’s word never approves forgiveness in spite of one’s sin. The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be used successfully to prop up the false teaching that sinful remarriages are “forgiven” after baptism in spite of its ongoing practice.

We would urge brethren who teach otherwise to give up their false conclusion that adulterers can continue in their adultery when they become Christians “because God forgives their sin of adultery.” God forgives every sinner when he repents of his sin and obeys the gospel, not before (Acts 17:30; 2:37-38).

Follow Me!

Mark Mayberry

Jesus said, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28-30). Heaven’s invitation is extended to all mankind — “Whosoever will . . .” (Rev. 22:17). In the four Gospels, Jesus said, “Follow me” some eighteen times. Yet, many do not comprehend the demands of discipleship: “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me.” Jesus calls us, not to a life of sinful sloth, but to a life of sacrificial service (Matt. 16:24-26).

Jesus calls those who are successful. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were prosperous fishermen; yet, when Jesus called them, they left their nets and followed him (Matt. 4:18-22). In like measure, Paul gave up position, prominence, and power (Phil. 3:4-8). Sadly, some value too highly the tokens of earthly success, and are thus unwilling to follow the Savior (Luke 18:18-27).

The rich are called to a higher purpose: good works and humble servitude (Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Tim. 6:17-19). Peter and his companions gave up everything for the cause of Christ: possessions, prosperity, peace, and ultimately, life itself. Yet, the return on their spiritual investment was beyond measure (Matt. 19:27-30; Mark 10:28-31).

Jesus calls those who are scoundrels. After having called Matthew/Levi, Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners (Matt. 9:9-13). To what end? For the purpose of endorsement or acceptance? No. Jesus called sinners to repentance, i.e., a change of heart followed by a change of life (Luke 5:27-32).

Sinners are called to a higher purpose: sanctification and

service (Isa. 1:16-17; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). Whatever time we have spent in the service of sin is enough — it is irredeemably wasted and lost. Disciples of Christ must cease from sin, and devote what remains of life to accomplishing the will of God (1 Pet. 4:1-6).

Jesus calls those who are simplistic. Those who follow him must understand the nature of discipleship (Luke 9:57-62). They must count the cost and be willing to pay the price (Luke 14:25-33). Spiritual service is not a life of ease, but involves deprivation (1 Cor. 4:10-16), tribulation (Acts 14:21-22), affliction (1 Thess. 3:2-4), and persecution (2 Tim. 3:10-12).

Jesus calls those who are sin-sick. After having thrice denied the Lord, Peter was discouraged to the point of quitting, along with the other disciples (John 21:3). Yet, the resurrected Savior met them on the shore of Galilee, demonstrating once again his majestic power (John 21:4-14). Jesus restored Peter to his apostleship, by repeatedly saying, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17).

Afterwards, a most interesting discussion ensued. Jesus prophesied of Peter’s martyrdom, and then solemnly said, “Follow me!” Yet, Simon bar Jonah distractedly asked, “What about John?” Rebuking him, Jesus replied, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!” In other words, Peter was told to mind his own business, to focus on his own service, to avoid foolish questions, and senseless speculation. Nothing must distract us from following Christ (John 21:18-22; Tit. 3:9)!

Are you willing to accept the call of Jesus Christ? Just as it was necessary for Jesus to die, we also must die to sin (John 12:23-26). If you are not a Christian, resolve to follow him! Be buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:1-4).

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“Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit”

Jim McDonald

Matthew 5-7 records what universally is called “The Sermon on the Mount.” This sermon was given by Jesus to his disciples in the presence of the multitudes. It is thought to have been given after Jesus had spent the night in prayer and chosen his twelve disciples from among the multitude. No greater sermon was ever given, and while some view it as Jesus’ explanation of the real meaning of the law, we believe Jesus was setting forth the fundamentals of his approaching kingdom. We remember that “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it” (Luke 16:16). With John, then Jesus, a new era was dawning and both preached about that kingdom which each proclaimed was “at hand.”

The sermon begins with what men commonly call “The Beatitudes.” The word “beatitude” comes from “blessed” and is a reference to the eight different times that one is said to be “blessed” in the sermon. The word “blessed” literally means “happy” and thus some of these “beatitudes” are paradoxical: “Blessed (happy) are they that mourn” for instance (Matt. 5:4). Different inspired men wrote of the blessed who are happy, and we recall David’s description of such a man in from Psalm 1. The first “beatitude” Jesus gives is “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). Who are these whom the Lord calls “poor in spirit”? They are not the people who are poor spirited. The ten spies returned to their camp from Canaan with the feeling “we cannot take the land.” In the parable of the talents, the “one-talent” man was so afraid of failure that he failed to do anything. Neither is one poor in spirit who holds self in contempt. He who is poor in spirit is humble with a child-like faith. The Scriptures furnish us many examples of such people. Consider John the Baptist when he contrasted himself with the coming Messiah of whom he was herald. “He it is, whom coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose” (John 1:27). John always demonstrated this humble attitude when he spoke of Jesus and himself. He said that “he must increase but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

The centurion whose faith Jesus commended as exceeding that of all Israel was a man of power and prestige. Yet when he considered the lowly Galilean preacher, Jesus (whom others might lightly esteem, who had no home, no possessions), the centurion would not personally appeal to Jesus nor invite him into his home. His explanation: “I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof” (Luke 7:6). We add to these the prodigal, the publican, and Paul (Luke 15:19; 18:13; 2 Cor. 12:16). The greatest example of all would be Jesus for he gave us an example of how to walk and live in all circumstances. He taught the disciples humility by stooping down and washing their feet (John 13:5). We are admonished also to be “poor in spirit” — “for I say to every man that is among you . . . not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (Rom. 12:3). We must “put on . . . a heart of lowliness” (Col. 3:12). James urged, “Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and he will exalt you” (Jas. 4:10). Did not Jesus say, “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted, but he that exalteth himself shall be humbled?” (Luke 14:11).

A proud man will not humble himself to enter God’s kingdom. He is too proud to confess that he is lost and needy and considers himself too good to serve. God resists and hates men with such spirits. But those who are the opposite of this, revel in even the lowest place in God’s service because of the greatness of God. David said it well, “For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Ps. 84:10). “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

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**No man ever fails until he fails
on the inside.**

“Biting and Devouring” continued from front page

one another. They were not to bite and devour one another. The action of biting and devouring in verse 15, is in contrast with the action of love in verses 13 and 14. The action of biting and devouring is also a work of the flesh. Follow the thought into the next verse, Galatians 5:16: “But I say, walk by the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Paul uses the word “but” again to make a contrast. The Galatian Christians were not to bite and devour one another (v.15), “but,” they were to walk by the Spirit (v.16). Their action of biting and devouring one another was fulfilling “the lust of the flesh.”

So, what is biting and devouring? The word “bite” (Gr. *dakno*), found one time in the New Testament in Galatians 5:15, is used metaphorically by Paul of wounding the soul with words of reproach. The word “devour” (Gr. *katesthio*), found six times in the New Testament, means “to consume.” Like the word “bite,” Paul uses the word “devour” metaphorically of consuming someone with verbal reproaches. Biting and devouring is the act of verbally assaulting another in an unkind, unloving way. Biting and devouring involves gossip, backbiting, unjust criticism, and other sins of the tongue. It stirs up strife and causes division. Biting and devouring is a work of the flesh, and it is clearly condemned by Paul. Biting and devouring is just as much a work of the flesh as the sinful items listed in Galatians 5:19-21. Brethren who “bite and devour one another” like wild animals, will destroy themselves and others who are affected by it. No Christian should engage in biting and devouring his fellow-brother in Christ.

Now, the question is this: Are faithful brethren biting and devouring one another today when they, with godly character, proclaim the truth of God’s word in current controversies? Absolutely not. There are a number of activities that a Christian must engage in from time to time that cause controversy. When a Christian engages in these activities, he is not biting and devouring, he is simply following what the New Testament teaches. Consider a few examples. When a Christian debates an issue with an opponent as Paul and Barnabas did in Antioch (Acts 15:1-2), is he biting and devouring his opponent? No. When two Christians differ strongly in matters of opinion and express themselves sharply as Paul and Barnabas did (Acts 15:36-41), are they biting and devouring one another? No. When a local church exercises discipline by withdrawing its fellowship from a disorderly member as Corinth did (1 Cor. 5:1-13), is it biting and devouring the disorderly member? No. When a Christian stands up to another Christian to correct him publicly with the truth as Paul did Peter (Gal. 2:11-14), is he biting and devouring his brother? No. When a Christian identifies error by name as Jesus (Matt. 16:6; Mark 8:15), Paul (1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:16-18; 3:8; Tit. 1:12) and other apostles did (2 Pet. 2:15-16; 2 John 9; Jude 11; Rev. 2:14-20), is he biting and devouring the person in

error? No. When a Christian reproves and rebukes as commanded by Paul (2 Tim. 4:2), is he biting and devouring? No. When a Christian tests a person’s teaching with God’s truth and finds it to be false as commanded by John (1 John 4:1-6), is he biting and devouring the false teacher? No. When a Christian contends earnestly for the faith as commanded by Jude (Jude 3), is he biting and devouring? No. Brethren, these actions are not actions of biting and devouring!

Several years ago Robert H. Farish wrote a good little tract on the subject of Galatians 5:15, entitled *The Sin of Spiritual Cannibalism*. Toward the end of the tract he penned these words:

The approved actions of reproving and rebuking are not to be confused with the condemned action of “biting and devouring.” Every member of the church has the divinely imposed obligation to “reprove and rebuke”; he must also “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” — but every member of the church is required to avoid “biting and devouring.” There is no conflict between the divine requirement and the divine prohibition. The Holy Spirit requires the Christian to “reprove, rebuke and exhort with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2). The same Holy Spirit requires the Christian to refrain from “biting and devouring” (4-5).

“Care should be exercised to avoid arraying “truth” against “love.” Mistakes are often made by quoting passages of Scripture which approve rebuking a brother, in justification of actions which by no stretch of the imagination can be identified as anything but “spiritual cannibalism.” It is a serious blunder to seek to justify “biting and devouring” by quoting passages which require “reproving and rebuking.” It is equally serious to condemn proper “reproving and rebuking” by citing prohibitions against “biting and devouring” (5).

Brother Farish was on target when he wrote these words. He reminds us that a proper balance must be maintained when using Galatians 5:15. This passage must not be taken out of its context and made to mean something that contradicts other New Testament passages. It is easy to take Galatians 5:15 out of its context and misuse it. If cases of biting and devouring exists among us today, then the Christians engaged in it need to cease and repent. However, if Galatians 5:15 is cited against faithful brethren who are upholding God’s word in controversies, then this passage is being misused, and the one misusing it needs to cease and repent. Faithful brethren today who are standing for the truth on such subjects as creation, fellowship and marriage and divorce are not biting and devouring others as per Galatians 5:15. What are they doing? They are doing just what the New Testament instructs them to do.

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“Elitism” continued from page 2

us that one guard himself from thinking about others in the way that the Pharisees did. Jeremiah warned those of his day against the danger of trusting in the Temple saying, “Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these” (7:4). The Jews of Jeremiah’s day thought that they could live any way they wanted without fear of God’s judgment because the Temple was in their midst. Jeremiah had to teach them that having the Temple among them was no substitute for personal righteousness.

Christians who are clinging to the revelation of God may stumble into similar thinking. One may begin to think that he is acceptable with God because he is in the Lord’s one true church rather than the denominations of men. He may think, “We don’t teach salvation by faith only, the perseverance of the saints, and other Calvinist doctrines. We are not mixed up on tongue speaking, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and miraculous divine healing. We do not honor the pope, believe in on-going revelation when the pope speaks *ex cathedra*, or pray through Mary. We are not caught up in the teachings of Joseph Smith, Ellen G. Wright, or other books claiming to be inspired of God.” Such thinking may cause one to look down on the common people of America with the same attitude that the Pharisees manifested toward their fellow man. I have heard comments made in Bible classes against denominational folks by brethren who sounded remarkably similar to the Pharisees.

Elitist thinking may be illustrated by our divisions over various items. One might think that we are a great people because “we don’t use instrumental music in worship, send donations to church institutions (missionary societies, benevolent societies, colleges, medical organizations, etc.), believe in premillennialism, have a fellowship hall, have a sponsoring church, or accept loose doctrines on divorce and remarriage. Therefore, we are better than our brethren.” Such attitudes sound remarkably similar to that of the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned. One must be careful not to develop the belief that one is saved because he has perfect understanding of God’s word and perfect obedience, for that is the doctrine of salvation by works which the apostle Paul condemned. Such a doctrine will lead to the same attitude toward those who are not “of us” as was manifested by the Pharisees toward those who were not Pharisees.

Other Spiritual Elitism

Having warned of the danger that this mentality poses to myself and my own brethren, perhaps one will tolerate my pointing out that there is spiritual elitism in some other places as well. Neither that which is practiced among us nor that practiced in other places is healthy. Perhaps my pointing out what I perceive as elitism in others will not be so offensive since I have begun by reminding those who

believe as I do about its dangers.

In American politics. Have you noticed the elitist attitude which the political left has toward the political right? One can have a “right wing extremist” but there is no such critter as a “left wing extremist” in American politics. Those who protest abortion, oppose homosexuality, believe that welfare programs succeed to the degree that they get Americans off of welfare programs, and oppose national government run health care programs and the rest of the left wing political agenda are viewed as unenlightened and to be feared. Journalists in America rarely treat the political left and political right as equals. Although various surveys have reported that about 90% of American journalists vote left, these journalists are oblivious to their own bias in reporting the news.

In mainstream American religion. Mainstream Protestant denominationalism is controlled by modernists who look down with transparent disdain upon Evangelicals and Fundamentalists who believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God. Evangelicals and Fundamentalists are generally viewed as but a step or two above a cave man who just recently crawled out of the backwoods to integrate with society. Their mental abilities are thought to be a several steps lower than the rest of society. An effort is made to compare Christian “fundamentalists” to the Islamic fundamentalists who support terrorism. This picture of Evangelical and Fundamental religion is skewed and biased. There are Evangelical and Fundamentalist scholars who stand shoulder to shoulder with the most educated modernist scholars. The modernist depiction of the Evangelicals and Fundamentalists as redneck ignoramus reveals more about the modernists than it does the Evangelicals. It manifests their elitist attitude.

In brotherhood conflicts. The same attitudes that are manifested in American politics and mainstream Protestant denominationalism crop up in brotherhood controversies. Those who are moving away from revelation think themselves more enlightened than the rest of us. In reading the articles published in Carl Ketcherside’s paper several years ago, one would read about the “conversion” experience of those who were moving toward a more liberal approach to fellowship. These brethren would speak about their unenlightened past when they were rabid sectarians; but now in their more enlightened state they look upon those whom they left with condescension.

In reviewing the articles written about whether or not one should fellowship those who teach unrevealed doctrines about divorce and remarriage, one senses the same spiritual elitism from those who resent brethren who expose their doctrines as false teaching and their teachers as false teachers. There is an element among us who think themselves too spiritually superior to engage in the “paper fights,”

“sinful debating,” and “jingoism.” They do not want to be “spiritual buzzards” or “dogs” like those who reply to the teaching of Homer Hailey on divorce and remarriage, to the seventeen-article series by Ed Harrell on fellowship, and the teachings of Shane Scott and Hill Roberts on the days of creation. They believe themselves to be too spiritually refined to lower themselves to that level. Though some say they disagree with brother Hailey’s teaching on divorce and remarriage, they do not want to be “spiritual buzzards” or “dogs” like they say those are who reply to the teaching of Homer Hailey on divorce and remarriage. Though they say they disagree with brother Harrell’s expanded views on fellowship, particularly as it pertains to Romans 14, they do not want to be “spiritual buzzards” or “dogs” like they say those are who have answered brother Harrell’s teaching. Though some say they personally believe the days of Genesis one are six literal days, they do not want to be “spiritual buzzards” or “dogs” like they say those are who have dared to question, challenge, and answer the teachings of Shane Scott and Hill Roberts on the days of creation. They believe themselves to be too spiritually refined to lower themselves to that level. Some appear to be concerned that, if they replied to the ones who argue that they days of creation are long periods of time, they may be judged by their academic colleagues as belonging to the Flat-earth society — that is, as unenlightened ignoramuses.

The thinking is that those who are truly educated know that believing the world was created in six days is absurd! If that be true, how long will it be until we are told that those who are truly educated know that believing the flood was a world wide event is absurd? Or, that those who are truly educated know that believing Jonah was literally swallowed by a great fish, is equally absurd? This attitude of spiritual elitism is no different from that attitude manifested by the political left toward the political right and modern Protestant denominationalists toward Evangelicals and Fundamentalists. Our brethren faced this same elitism when they opposed church support of colleges, orphan homes,

and sponsoring churches, so why should one be surprised when he sees its ugly head rise again in the modern conflicts over the literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and discussions on Matthew 19:9 pertaining to divorce and remarriage?

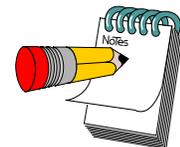
The spiritually elite of whom I speak will resent this article. They will see it as further proof of the “backwoods” mentality that disqualifies us from being given a fair, objective hearing. Sadly, some who will see these facts and recognize that the spiritually elite have been exposed, will, nonetheless, sit silently by and refuse to acknowledge the truth that has been spoken lest they, too, be labeled as spiritual hillbillies.

Conclusion

Spiritual elitism is ugly wherever it appears — whether practiced by those who believe and practice the truth or by those who are moving away from the truth. Neither side has a franchise on elitist attitudes. I am persuaded that brethren can do better than this. Brethren can show a healthy respect for those with whom we disagree and still discuss their differences avidly. The attitude of searching the Scriptures daily to see if what is taught is so (Acts 17:11) begins with the humility that recognizes, “I might be wrong.” The elitist attitude is, “I can’t be wrong.” Which one does each of us have?

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Quips & Quotes



Forcing Abortion

“Mandated abortions are usually associated with China, but recent news stories show it happens in the United States, too. Before she was the WNBA’S coach of the year, Washington Mystics head coach Marianne Stanley was at the University of California at Berkeley. There, reports The Washington Post, she told newly pregnant assistant coach Sharrona Alexander that she could keep either her unborn baby or her job. Likewise, The WashingtonTimes reports that Samantha Robinson, interim Assistant Emergency Medical Services chief for Washington, D.C., told trainees they’d be fired upon pregnancy. Three of the trainees, fearing for their jobs, had abortions. But this isn’t China — Alexander (who refused to have the abortion) received a \$115,000 settlement from the school, and Robinson was forced to retire” (Christianity Today [November 18, 2002], 21).

“Confessing” Christians Stick It Out

“Theologically conservative Christians say a new ecumenism

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is blossoming within liberal mainline Protestant denominations — and they are hoping it will help conservatives continue working for reform in their denominations.

“More than 600 people from 12 United States and Canadian denominations gathered for ‘Confessing the Faith’ gathering on October 24-26 in Indianapolis. The Association for church Renewal, which describes itself as ‘A Fellowship of Evangelical Renewal Leaders from Mainline Churches in North America,’ sponsored the conference.

“Leaders urged each other to resist the temptation to leave over theological and moral differences. The conference released a statement, ‘Be Steadfast: A Letter to Confessing Christians,’ written by 18 conservative theologians from mainline Protestant denominations. The statement says in part, ‘We urge our brothers and sisters not to withdraw, but mutually to encourage one another to a struggle in which there is good hope.’

“At the same time, United Methodist theologian Thomas Oden, a leader proponent of a new ecumenism, conceded that some conservatives may have to leave liberal churches. Though Oden could not attend the event because of illness, his plenary address was read by James Heidinger, a leader in the United Methodist Good News movement” (Christianity Today [December 9, 2000], 18).

PCUSA Group Seeks Special Assembly

“Presbyterian conservatives, led by two members of a church in Newport Beach, California, are circulating a petition for a special assembly in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The gathering would discipline churches and pastors who have defied a church law banning the ordination of non-celibate gays and lesbians” (Christianity Today [January 2003], 19).

Patrick Henry College

“The American Academy for Liberal Education on November 2 granted initial accreditation status to Patrick Henry College. Last April the association had denied accreditation to the 150-student school in Purcellville, Virginia, because it taught six-day creationism in biology classes (CT, July 8, 2002, p. 16). PHC, designed for home schooled students, appealed the action before an outside panel of college administrators. The panel rejected the argument that a school teaching creationism fails to teach the sciences. It did, however, seek assurances that PHC will allow full discussion of other views. The school amended its Statement of Biblical World-view to clarify that it did allow such discussion. The AALE then granted the preliminary accreditation. After five years a school with pre-accreditation receives a review for full accreditation (Christianity Today [January 2003], 23).

Belief at Odds with Bible, Poll Finds

“Nine out of 10 adults own at least one Bible and eight out of 10 consider themselves to be Christian, but you’d never know it from the smorgasbord of religious beliefs professed by most people. A nationwide survey conducted by the Barna Research Group of Ventura, California, indicates that a large share of the people who attend Protestant or Catholic churches have adopted beliefs that conflict with the teachings of the Bible and their church. Six out of 10 Americans (60 percent) reject the existence of Satan, indicating that the devil is merely a symbol of evil. More than one-third of the public (35 percent) also believe that it is possible to communicate with people after they die. Protection from eternal condemnation for one’s sins is widely considered to be earned rather than received as a free gift from God. Half of all adult (50 percent) argue that anyone who ‘is generally good or does enough good things for others during their life will earn a place in Heaven.’ A plurality of adults (44 percent) contends that ‘the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon are all difference expressions of the same spiritual truths.’ Just 38 percent of Americans reject that idea” (Christian Standard [December 22, 2002], 7).

Preachers Needed

San Angelo, Texas: The Green Meadow church of Christ is looking for a sound, full-time preacher. The church is presently able to fully support a preacher and has a new building with room to expand. Attendance averages in the mid-70s. There is a need for someone motivated in doing personal work. This is a sound congregation at peace. If interested, contact John Sanders (915) 944-3865, John Dykema (915) 224-4167, or Jim Neddo (915) 944-8147.

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