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Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

HOUSE CHURCH — VIRTUAL CHURCH

Bruce Stulting

Throughout the centuries, there have been many attacks on the structure of the Lord's church. These attacks have focused on the universal as well as the largest and smallest organized entity of the universal church—the church in any geographic location (the local church). Efforts have been made to restructure the worship, organization, the terms of entrance, the women's role in the assembly, and fellowship of the church. Currently, there is an attitude developing toward membership and the authority of the elders that, if followed to its logical conclusion, will cripple or destroy the local congregation. Some are beginning to deny the ability of elders to purge the local congregation of sin and/or regulate its membership. Others are claiming that it is possible to be a member of the Lord's church on the universal level, but not on a congregational level. In other words, they claim one can be a Christian and not be a member of any local congregation. Still others are contending that one can place membership in a church/congregation that is located in another city, state, or even country from where they reside. It is suggested that such membership is made possible by using Skype, Zoom, or the like (to be discussed later) via the Internet. The remainder of this article will discuss each of these new ideas regarding membership.

ALL CHRISTIANS ARE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AND MUST BE MEMBERS IN A LOCAL CONGREGATION

The New Testament speaks of the Lord's church in three ways. The word *church* is used in the universal sense with

reference to the saved everywhere (Mat. 16:16,18; Col. 1:18). It is used with reference to a church/congregation in any geographic location (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2; Rev. 1, 2, 3). It is also used with reference to assemblies of the local church convened for religious purposes (1 Cor. 11:18). The Lord wants us to be concerned about the church in whatever sense inspiration has used the term.

A casual reading of the New Testament will cause one to realize that the concept for church membership is taught. Likewise, one can see multiple reasons for being a faithful member of a faithful local congregation. It is easily understood that when one is scripturally baptized, the Lord by that act adds one to the church universal (Gal. 3:26, 27, ct. Acts 2:47). The church universal is essentially a relationship between God and the Christian. The "kingdom" or "church" in this respect has little organization beyond the fact that Christ is the Head (Eph. 1:22,23), nor, does it have any tangible features as such (Luke 17:20,21). As we shall see, the Scriptures teach that the Christian is to be a functional part of a local church/congregation.

Let us consider the fact of local churches/congregations as previously defined. While the Lord adds one to His church universal, one must place membership with a local church/congregation (Acts 9:26, 27). There are about 33 separate local churches mentioned in the New Testament. For instance, there was the local church at Philippi described as, "...to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Phi. 1:1). The church at Philippi came into existence when Lydia, the Jailer, and their respective families heard and obeyed the gospel (Acts 16:15,33). These 33 local churches/congregations consisted of Christians in a geographic area that had banded together as a local church/congregation. Since the church/congregation consists of individual members, we read of the church "unassembled" and also "gathered together" (Acts 14:27, 1 Cor. 11:18, 14:28). It should be obvious to the casual reader that these churches/

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Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Founder
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Editorial...

OBSERVING THE LORD'S SUPPER

The article by brother Bruce Stulting beginning on the front page of this issue of *CFTF* first appeared on the front page of the November/December 2010 issue of this paper. It is again printed primarily because it teaches the truth regarding the largest and smallest organized entity of the one church of our Lord—the church in any geographic location, a local church. Further, in his article, brother Stulting emphasized the New Testament teaching that one must be a member of a local church/congregation in order to be faithful to the Lord. Among other things, he wrote to combat the false view that a local church could divide into groups, meet in different member's houses, and do so with God's approval. He also refuted the error that church members are faithful to God when they virtually assemble via the Internet in an attempt to engage in all five acts of worship of the first day of the week assembly, thinking that such qualifies as said assembly. I encourage our readers to read brother Stulting's article before continuing with this one.

With the truths of brother Stulting's article in mind, we will specifically focus on the observance of the Lord's Supper and the first day of the week worship assembly. Acts 20:7 concerns the church at Troas. It reads: **“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”** The church assembled by the authority of apostolic teaching. Moreover, they assembled with the brother who taught them the doctrine of Christ, the apostle Paul. Thus, they came together for the purpose of participating in the acts of worship in their first day of the week worship assembly with apostolic approval.

As noted, in that assembly on the first day of the week they gathered together **“to break bread.”** Obviously, they did not assemble only to break bread into pieces and nothing else. **“To break bread”** is what grammarians call a synecdoche—*where a part stands for the whole or a whole for its parts*. In its common usage, **“To break bread”** means to partake of a common meal. If I invited you to break bread with me you would know that I meant for us to eat a meal together. In fact, that terminology in the past was used regularly to mean people eating a common meal together, but it is not used so much in that way today.

In the case of Acts 20:7, **“to break bread”** means, at least, to partake of the whole Lord's Supper in the first day of the week assembly. Thus, **“to break bread”** in Acts 20:7 means also to partake of the fruit of the vine. However, since the first day of the week church assembly does not only involve partaking of the Lord's Supper, but also prayer, singing, giving of our means, and Bible teaching, I believe **“to**

break bread” in Acts 20:7 is a synecdoche standing for the complete first day of the week worship done by the saints in said assembly of a local church. It stands, then, for the complete worship of a local church on the first day of the week.

The Lord’s Supper is not the most important act of worship, but it focuses specifically on the death of our Lord and is to be done in remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice of Himself for us on the cross. Every avenue or act of worship is of equal importance. Thus, as emphasized, the observance of the Lord’s Supper is one of the component parts of worship. Inspiration chose it to stand for the whole first day of the week worship of a church in any geographic location when its members have convened so to do.

In the totality of the instruction found in the New Testament regarding saints partaking of the Lord’s Supper, the only place the Lord’s Supper is observed is in the first day of the week worship assembly of a local church. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth in part to correct their abuses of the observance of the Lord’s Supper. In the context of 1 Corinthians 11:17–33, the apostle told the Corinthian brethren what was required of them in the first day of the week assembly regarding the scriptural observance of the Lord’s Supper. I emphasize that Paul said the following was to be done **“in”** the first day of the week worship assembly in order for them scripturally to show forth the Lord’s death till he come (1 Cor. 11 17-33).

1. The context of this passage is **“when you come together”** — vs. 17.

2. Paul continues, **“when you come together in the church”** — vs. 18.

3. Again the apostle said, **“When you come together”** — vs 20.

4. The point that must not be missed here is this—it was a gathering of all the church at Corinth into one place. The church was not scattered into smaller groups meeting in different places throughout the city.

5. Finally, Paul again emphasizes, **“when you come together to eat.”** This expression is in harmony with Acts 20:7 where Luke records, **“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread...”**

6. Notice that in partaking of the Lord’s Supper Paul said to Christians **“...when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another”** (1 Cor. 11:33). How could the church in Corinth obey this command and be scattered into groups meeting throughout the city? The fact of the matter is this, they could not obey vs. 33 in such an unscriptural arrangement.

Thus, there is no New Testament authority to observe the Lord’s Supper outside the first day of the week worship assembly of the local church (Col. 3:17). Surely, those who know that we must have New Testament authority for our

beliefs and practices understand that it is sinful to act without said authority (Col. 3:17; John 12:48).

Some have noted that brethren of yesteryear (some of them preachers) went into communities where no church of Christ existed and assembled to worship on the Lord’s day, possibly in their own houses. That being the case, certain brethren have concluded that church members may meet to worship God on the first day of the week in different groups outside and independent of the local church’s assembly. However, they fail to realize that upon said brethren’s arrival in a place where the church had not been planted, they then constituted the church in that place.

In the mid-1950’s the late Ira Y. Rice, Jr. moved with his family to Singapore to plant the Lord’s church. Of course, that meant the Lord’s church did not exist in Singapore before the Rice’s arrival. However, when he and his family arrived, those who were Christians in his family constituted the church in Singapore. Before the first Lord’s day came around, brother Rice prepared a sign that announced the church would be meeting for worship, giving the place of worship to be the Rice’s place of residence. Thus, therein the Lord’s church met for worship on the first Lord’s day following the arrival of the Rice’s in Singapore. The foregoing is a far cry from the so-called erroneous “house church” concept promoted for many years by false brethren that brother Stulting exposed and refuted in his article. Also, it also does not compare to brethren who desire to engage in the worship of God on the first day of the week, but do so outside a faithful church’s authorized assembly of worship.

As the denominational people do, some members of the church have their comfort zones from which they will not be move. That is the sad case even when they cannot find any New Testament authority for their beliefs and actions. The fact of the matter is this, some people claim membership in the Lord’s church for the same reason people are members of denominations—that is all they have ever known, they are comfortable with it, and happy with the way things are done rather than because they love the Lord, His truth, and seek to ascertain the Lord’s authority for all their beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, worshipping God in spirit and in truth continues to be important to the faithful who are determined to have New Testament authority for all they believe and practice (John 4:23).

The church, or any individual member, or group of them constitute the final authority in determining what is right and wrong. It is the pure unvarnished truth of God’s infallible Word that brings the church into existence, strengthens it, and keeps it faithful (Mat. 28:18; John 8:31, 32; 12:48; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Jam. 1:25). Thus, we must have New Testament authority for all we believe and practice. Without that authority we are nothing but fuel for the eternal fires of Hell.

—David P. Brown, Editor

(Continued From Page 1)

congregations were not an optional matter, but were, in fact, an essential part and feature of New Testament Christianity.

It should be added that there is no authority for an organization larger or smaller than the local church/congregation. In other words, each congregation is autonomous (self-governing). Thus, the eldership has no authority beyond the borders of the local church/congregation they oversee (Acts 20:28). Likewise, there is no authority for an entity to exist that is smaller than the local church/congregation. This would condemn the individual Christian who refused to place membership in a faithful congregation.

Let us consider the fact of placing membership in a local church/congregation. We have two occasions upon which Saul placed membership in a local church/congregation. It is usually the case that one becomes a member of the congregation where they are converted. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Saul became a member of the church at Damascus (Acts 9:10-22). After his conversion in Damascus, he traveled to Jerusalem and “...he assayed to join himself to the disciples...” (Acts 9:26,27). The word *join* is translated from the Greek κολλάω. According to Thayer this word means “1) to glue, to glue together, cement, fasten together; 2) to join or fasten firmly together; 3) to join one’s self to, cleave to.” This is descriptive of close, personal, and intimate relationships. Jesus used this word when describing the relationship and proximity of husband and wife (Mat. 19:9). κολλάω is simply defined as, “To glue or cement together, then, generally, to unite, to join firmly...” (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, by W. E. Vine). Thus, κολλάω is indicative of the importance and the nature of membership in the local church.

Because of Saul’s boldness in preaching Christ, the Greeks sought to kill him. When the brethren in Jerusalem discovered the plot against Saul’s life, they sent him through Caesarea to Tarsus (Acts 9:29,30).

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:25,26).

The word *assembled* is translated from the Greek word συνάγω. According to Thayer (all following definitions are from Thayer), this word means, “2) to bring together, assemble, collect; 2a) to join together, join in one (those previously separated); 2b) to gather together by convoking; 2c) to be gathered, i.e. come together, gather, meet.” By “**joining**” or “**assembling**” oneself to a local church/congregation, one becomes an identifiable and contributing part of that assembly. From the foregoing, it is reasonable to assume that Saul “**joined**” himself to the church of Tarsus if one existed in that city. Otherwise, he himself and any other Christians with him would constitute the church in Tarsus. Thus, Saul was never

without membership in a local church/congregation.

IT IS GOD’S INTENT THAT CHRISTIANS HAVE MEMBERSHIP IN A LOCAL CHURCH/CONGREGATION

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Christians must be members of a local church/congregation. Other than Christ being head of the universal church, the local church/congregation is the largest governmental organization of which we read in the New Testament. Too many have adopted a “floating” policy where they go wandering around all over the place and never place membership in any local church/congregation. Thus, they never assume responsibility anywhere for anything. Christians who act like a bunch of “jumping fleas” hopping from one dog to another never helped build up anything good. We are not talking about an occasional visit with faithful brethren in other places. But we are concerned about those upon whom you can never depend, who will not take any assignment, will not be a permanent member of any congregation, and do not feel any sense of duty anywhere in particular and nowhere in general.

Membership in the local church is presupposed by the command of “**not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together**” (Heb. 10:25). The assembling was obviously the matter of “**come together in the church**”—more on this later (2 Cor. 11:18, cf. Acts 2:42). Some believe that they can justify the practice of just being a detached or freelance Christian, not being a member of any particular local church but visiting around. Notice again the language of Hebrews 10:25, “**Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.**” The Hebrews writer is addressing specific people and a specific act—the practice of themselves coming together. This assembling together is not optional, nor is it without serious consequence if ignored (Heb. 10:25-31). In fact, the context indicates that to thus “**forsake**” is to “**...sin willfully**”; and the result of sinning willfully is “**...there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins**” (vs. 26).

Thus far, we have established Scriptural authority for: (1) the requirement of the local church/congregation; (2) the requirement of every Christian being a member of a local congregation; and (3) the sin and consequences of forsaking “**the assembling of ourselves together.**” Such is the nature of the New Testament church. We will now turn our attention to the errors mentioned in the introduction of this article.

SOME IMPLICATIONS OF CHURCH/CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

We have already established that every Christian must be a member of a local church/congregation. There are two options available to the Christian: (1) locate and “**join**” oneself to a sound/faithful church/congregation in the area; or (2) if no such congregation exists, one must be established. This is the case since the faithful Christian constitutes the church wherever he/she is when no other exists as in the case of Saul in Tarsus as earlier mentioned, or where only an apostate church exists. Of the 33 congregations mentioned in the New

Testament, some were located in the homes of some of the members e.g., the church that met in the home of Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19). Where the church assembles is a matter of expediency.

LEAVING A SOUND/FAITHFUL CONGREGATION IMPROPERLY

Though it is becoming increasingly rare, there could be more than one sound/faithful congregation in close proximity to a Christian's home. Since it is a matter of expediency, the Christian can choose which congregation he will **"join."** Once the choice is made, the Christian's support, devotion, and loyalty is to the congregation where he/she is a member. However, he can offer fellowship to the other sound congregations in the area. Over the course of time, the Christian may determine that another sound congregation in the area is more suitable to his needs and talents. Since his membership is a matter of expediency, he has the liberty to move his membership to that other congregation. It would be necessary to discuss this move with the leadership of both congregations before membership is transferred. All of this is done through expediency with the underlying authority of maintaining membership in a local church/congregation.

Any Scripturally sound action can be abused. One such abuse occurs when a Christian decides to remove his membership from a sound/faithful congregation for no legitimate reason. By "legitimate reason" we have in mind: (1) one who is moving from the area and distance would prohibit continued membership; (2) moving membership (as above) to another sound congregation in the area; and (3) for the purpose of establishing a congregation in another area where no sound congregation exists. All of these reasons are "legitimate" because they are authorized in the New Testament by direct statement, example, and implication. In the above listed reasons, fellowship is maintained with the congregation that one leaves and is extended to the congregation which one joins.

It is becoming more and more common for Christians to remove their membership from a sound church/congregation for no good reason. They simply cease to attend at the local church/congregation and begin to worship at home. They have no intention of moving from the community or "joining" another congregation. Since there is no authority to establish a "new" congregation where a sound/faithful one already exists, they are not even left with that option. Such people become "members at large" which has already been proven sinful. Furthermore, by removing their membership in such a manner, they are in effect breaking fellowship with sound/faithful brethren. This is implied by their refusal to work and worship with the local church/congregation. A Christian commits sin by leaving a sound/faithful congregation in this manner and is subject to discipline that must not be ignored!

Is there authority for a house church or a virtual church? By "house church," we mean a single eldership that exercises authority over more than one congregation (similar to that which was advocated by the Boston/Crossroad's movement

in the late 70's and 80's). By "virtual church," we mean a situation in which a Christian attempts to **"join"** a congregation in another city, state, or even country. This Christian's participation with said congregation would be limited to the Internet via programs such as Skype, Zoom, etc., phone calls, email and "snail" mail.

We have already determined that each congregation is autonomous and that elders have no authority beyond the membership of their own congregation. This being the case, there is no authority for the house church principle. No eldership can oversee the work of another congregation. The "house churches" have no right to exist apart from the local church/congregation. They must seek out and join a faithful church/congregation in their area. Or, if none are available, they must establish and function as the local church/congregation in their own community.

Similar to the "house church" principle is the "virtual church." For one to place membership over long distance (i.e., another city, state, country) ignores basic principles of worship, service, and fellowship. As we pointed out previously, the very meaning of the words *join* and *assemble* implies "gluing or fastening together" or "cleaving" to one another such as in a marriage. Could one be successfully married and perform all of the functions of matrimony if the couple were separated by tens, hundreds, or thousands of miles with no intention of ever coming together in the same place? The obvious answer is, "NO!" How then could Christians ever perform all of the functions of membership in a congregation if they are separated by tens, hundreds, or thousands of miles with no intention of ever coming together in the same place?

In First Corinthians chapter eleven, Paul rebukes the brethren for their abuse of the Lord's Supper. In this context, Paul uses several words/phrases to discuss the assembly of the Saints. Consider the following: (1) Come together from *συνέρχομαι* meaning: a) to come together b) to assemble; (2) Church from *ἐκκλησία* meaning: a) a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly b) in a Christian sense, an assembly of Christians gathered for worship in a religious meeting. This **"coming together"** and/or **"assembling"** is to be done in **"one place"** (1 Cor. 11:20). In the case where one is a "long distance" member (tens, hundreds, or thousands of miles away), the only type of **"coming together"** is in a "virtual" assembly on the Internet through such means as Skype, Zoom, etc. (Internet applications allowing two-way video conferencing). However, such a situation could hardly be considered **"coming together"** in **"one place."**

Furthermore, how could an eldership accept the oversight of such long distance members? There would be no way of knowing the spiritual condition of its flock. The elders must be **"among"** the flock and the flock must be **"among"** elders (1 Pet. 5:1, 2). It would be difficult to imagine a shepherd having a flock of sheep in Jerusalem and Ephesus at the same time and caring for both equally well. There are many

other problems with this arrangement, but these are sufficient to demonstrate that “house churches” and “virtual churches” are without authority and, therefore, sinful. If this practice is carried to its logical conclusion, it would destroy the local congregation. After all, if one person could place membership over a long distance, then everyone could. This would result in one universal worldwide congregation.

Elders have the responsibility to maintain its membership! We have already established that placing membership with a particular congregation is a matter of expediency. As such, the final determination of all membership resides with the elders of the congregation or with the men of the congregation in the absence of elders. This is true, because the elders have the final authority in the area of expediency. Thus, the eldership makes the final decision regarding accepting or rejecting one as a member of a local church/congregation. Simply desiring to “**join**” a “church/congregation” does not mean automatic acceptance.

Consider the case of Saul when he sought to “**join**” himself to the church at Jerusalem. At first, his membership was rejected (Acts 9:26). Here is an example of a faithful Christian being rejected for membership in a faithful congregation. Since membership in a local church/congregation is a matter of expediency, the leadership of the church in Jerusalem committed no sin. This is quite different from the attitude of Diotrophes who usurped the position of leadership in the church (3 John 9).

There are also circumstances that might call for the elders of a church/congregation to ask a faithful member to leave. Such was the case with Saul on at least two occasions. First, the brethren at Damascus sent Paul on his way when certain Jews sought to kill him (Acts 9:23-25). Likewise, the Jerusalem brethren also sent Saul on his way because Grecians threatened to kill him (Acts 9:29,30). Also, there could arise a disagreement over matters of judgment that are so great that it is necessary to separate. Such was the case with Paul and Barnabas regarding John Mark. “**And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other**” (Acts 15:39). If such matters of judgment can cause two faithful brethren to separate, surely it can happen with faithful members in a congregation today or anytime. When such contention over judgment arises, it is up to the elders to resolve the matter even if it means asking a member to depart.

Elders have a duty to purge the church of sin! There are some brethren who reject the concept of corrective church discipline altogether. Others agree that it is necessary, but fail to carry it out in a scriptural matter. Of the latter group, there are those who believe that we must mark, but not avoid those who are in sin and refuse to repent. They believe that we ought to encourage those from whom fellowship has been withdrawn to attend the various assemblies of the church. Let us consider a few principles and see if this is a Scriptural practice.

First, we are to “**...mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them**” (Rom. 16:17). It is impossible to avoid someone sitting in the pew next to you. Furthermore, by being allowed to continue to assemble, they may “**...by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple**” (Rom. 16:18).

Second, the fornicator in Corinth was to be “**taken away from among you**” (1 Cor. 5:2). This was necessary to purge out the leaven of sin from the congregation. Paul wrote, “**Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump as ye are unleavened...**” (1 Cor. 5:6,7). We cannot purge out the old leaven and be a new lump and at same time encourage the sinner to remain among us. The Israelites lost the battle of Ai because there was “**sin in the camp**” (Jos. 7).

Third, some brethren must be rejected because of the divisive nature of their sin. “**A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject**” (Tit. 3:10). Here we see the urgency necessary in dealing with some sinful brethren. Those who are causing division in the congregation must be rejected, which means shunned or avoided. Jesus warned, “**Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves**” (Mat. 7:15). Should we disrobe the wolf and then invite him to the assembly for dinner? Surely, all can see the absurdity of this.

The elders have a sacred responsibility to protect the sheep. This includes isolating them from the sickening influence of sinners. Thus, elders must take the lead in marking and avoiding those in sin. They must also encourage the flock to avoid those who are so marked. Should the one withdrawn from come to the assemblies, we must “**...count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother**” (2 The. 3:15).

CONCLUSION

The organization of the church is critical to New Testament Christianity. We must respect all aspects of the church both universally and congregationally. It is imperative that we recognize the need to be a member of a local church/congregation. Likewise, we must respect the authority of the elders in the area of expediency.

Some of the foregoing errors are committed out of ignorance of the Scriptures. Others result from a failure to rightly divide the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15) or rebellion against God, His Word, and the authority that He has given the elders of the local church/congregation. Whatever the cause, the result is sin. We encourage all who are engaged in such practice, to reconsider their actions, search the Scriptures, and repent of their sin. May this article encourage more study on these subjects.

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PREACH THE WORD

G. K. Wallace

There are a lot of priggish, puritanical brethren who are led astray by the assumed piety of certain preachers. What brother “Longface” preaches is purely the truth because he is such a devout man. They size up what he preaches by his piety and not by the Book. I am not opposed to piety. The Bible teaches us to be sober. It also teaches us to be honest. But the man who keeps insisting that he is honest is generally a crook. And he who parades his piety is usually a hypocrite. Piety, like honesty, flourishes better when it is treated as something personal and too sacred to be put on parade.

If our piety is the test of our soundness, then the Pharisees would be orthodox. They were reverent. The Pharisee, instead of leaving the door of his room open while he was on his knees praying, would stand out on the corner of the street and make long prayers. Thus, he could be seen of all men.

I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, nor a dresser of sycamore trees, but I predict that these super pious brethren will be on the street corners next. Paul was reverent, saintly, godly, and heavenly minded, but was not too pious to call one fellow a **“son of the devil”** (Acts 13:10). His brotherly love did not keep him from resisting Peter. **“I resisted him to his face because he stood condemned”** (Gal. 2:11—*ASV*, 1901). The real test of one’s orthodoxy is not his sincerity nor affected devotion, but whether he is true to the charge to preach the Word.

Realizing that the gospel and not piety is the power of God unto salvation, how shall we preach it? It must be preached boldly and without fear or favor. The second recorded prayer in the book of Acts is a prayer for boldness. Today, brethren call the preacher aside and tone his preaching until it is so tame as to be insipid.

Some say that we should be like John, the apostle of love. Of course, they think John was not vigorous and trenchant in his preaching. Was John a shy, soft, effeminate preacher of the Word? The Sanhedrin was amazed at **“the boldness of Peter and John”** (Acts 4:13). Please notice that the text says **“Peter and John.”** John was just as bold as Peter.

What reckless saints were those early preachers: They did not so much as regard their own lives in preaching Christ (Acts 20:24). Watch these great men in action and compare some brethren who are apparently afraid to quote the Great Commission with emphasis lest they should offend some sectarian. No doubt the uncompromising fearlessness of these apostles was derived from Christ. **“They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus”** (Acts 4:13).

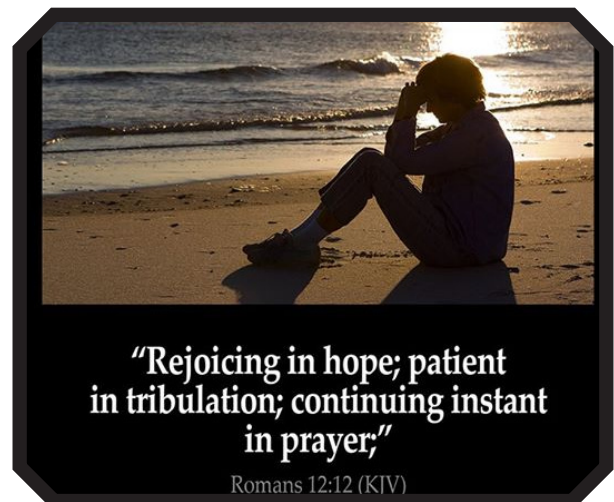
No one would suspect a compromising, cringing preacher of having been associated with the world’s greatest Preacher.

Faithful preaching of the Word of God will accomplish divine results. *First*, the Word preached, believed, and obeyed will put one into Christ where he is saved from his sins (Acts 2:38; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Gal. 3:26-27). *Second*, the Word preached will expose false teachers. Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus that false brethren would arise among them: **“I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them”** (Acts 20:29-30). False teachers should be exposed. Those in the church shall not be spared. *Third*, the Word preached fulfills the sacred charge of Paul to Timothy. We would thus save ourselves. **“Take heed unto thyself, and to thy teaching. Continue in these things; for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee”** (1 Tim. 4:16).

The gospel preached “with thoughts that breathe the words that burn” will please God and disturb man. The early preachers did not please everybody. Occasionally a preacher of our day boasts that all were pleased with his work. Even the sects dismissed to attend his services. How different from Paul. He did not please the world nor all the brethren. When he went into a place to preach he had a revival or a riot. The enemies of the truth spoke of Paul and his companions after this fashion, **“These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also”** (Acts 17:6b).

—Deceased

[Editor’s Note: *This article was written eighty-four years ago, but today it is more relevant than ever.*]



FORGIVENESS—WITHOUT REPENTANCE?

Guy N. Woods

Children of God should love all men, even their enemies, and when they repent, forgive them. Occasionally, I am asked if it is our duty to forgive those who sin against us when they neither ask for nor desire forgiveness. It is not only not our duty to do so, were we so disposed, but it is an utter impossibility.

The question recurs because many people persist in disregarding what the Scriptures teach is involved in genuine repentance and by substituting their concept of what they feel forgiveness should include. Those who do this imply, whether they intend to or not, that forgiveness is simply the cancellation of all bitter, revengeful, and uncharitable feelings toward those who sin against us, and the substitution of a disposition of kindness, love, and warm regard for the offending one or ones—a disposition, they urge, which should always be characteristic of faithful Christians.

But many devoted and dedicated disciples of the Lord never experience bitter, revengeful, and uncharitable feelings toward those who sin against them, however cruel and heartless such actions may have been. This attitude of a kind disposition is not forgiveness, anyway. God never entertains “bitter, revengeful, and uncharitable” feelings toward even the most vile of sinners, but He forgives only those who repent.

Our Lord, in the shadows of Gethsemane, prayed for those who hated Him so much they sought and obtained His execution, but He did not forgive them until they repented. Amid the agonies of the cross, He said to His Father, “**for-give them; for they know not what they do**” (Luke 23:34), a petition not unconditional in nature, since by His own words first uttered in the Great Commission (Mark 16:15-16) and later applied by Peter it was intent that pardon be

bestowed only on the basis of repentance and obedience to the commandments He gave (Acts 2:36-38).

The words *remission* and *forgiveness* often translate to the same Greek word *aphesis*, the meaning of which is “release,” and “sending of sins away” and the consequent restoration of the peaceful, cordial, and friendly relationship formerly existing. Unless the offender wants this “peaceful, cordial, friendly” relationship, it is impossible for the offended to affect it, however much he may desire and seek it.

It is this point people often say, “Yes, but we must be ready to forgive always,” as indeed we ought, but it should be recognized that such readiness is not forgiveness. Our Lord made crystal clear our obligation in all such cases when He said, “**Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times...turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him**” (Luke 17:3-4). Thus, the divine edict is, if one sins against us, we are to rebuke him; and when he repents, we are to forgive him.

It is the duty of all children of God to love all men, even their enemies, actively to seek their good, and pray for their well-being; and, when they repent, to forgive them. It should ever be borne in mind that reconciliation is an integral and essential element of the relationship resulting from penitence on the part of the offender and forgiveness on the offended, and that is occasioned by an adjustment and settlement of all differences that led to the alienation. We must be sure that no action or attitude of ours deters the proper response of others to us because our fellowship here on Earth and our salvation in Heaven are matters intimately involved.

—Deceased