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Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

“WHAT AUTHORITY MAY SCRIPTURALLY QUALIFIED ELDERS EXERCISE OVER A CONGREGATION?”

Guy N. Woods

A summary of the passages touching the function of this class of laborers in the church of the Lord reveals that they are styled “**elders**” (Phi. 1:1), “**bishops**” (1 Tim. 3:1), “**overseers**” (Acts 20:28), “**pastors**” (Eph. 4:11), “**the presbytery**” (1 Tim. 4:14). Other terms indicative of the functions of elders are *hoi proistameno* (“**he that ruleth**”) (Rom. 12:8; 1 The. 5:12), *hoi egoumenoi* (“**the ones having the rule**”) (Heb. 13:7), and *poimenas kai didaskalous* (“**shepherds and teachers**”) (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28). It must follow, therefore, that the ideas inherent in these terms must be characteristic of the elders’ functions today, seeing they are used in the Scriptures to describe their functions in the apostolic age.

What do these terms suggest? Before we introduce the lexicons which all must concede to be the highest authority in the world today in determining the meaning of Greek words, we ask a candid reading of the following statement from those eminent scholars, Conybeare and Howson, touching the function of elders in the apostolic age. “The office of the presbyters,” these eminent authorities say,

was to watch over the particular church in which they ministered, in all that regarded its external order and internal purity; they were to instruct the ignorant, to exhort the faithful, to confute the gainsayers, to warn the unruly, to comfort the feeble-minded, to support the weak, to be patient toward all. They were to take heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers, to feed the church of God which

he had purchased with his own blood. In one word, it was their duty (as it has been the duty of all who have been called to the same office during the nineteen centuries which have succeeded) to promote to the utmost of their ability, and by every means within their reach, the spiritual good of all those committed to their care.

The foregoing is, we believe, a fairly comprehensive statement of the duties and obligations of elders in the church today. In discharging these functions, to what extent may they, under God, assert themselves, and claim authority as such? The terms directly bearing on this phase of the question as applied to elders are: “**overseers**” (Acts 20:28) “**pastors**” (Eph. 4:11), “**the ones having the rule over you**” (Heb. 13:7), and the additional injunction to,

obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17).

Summarizing, elders, in the discharge of their duties, are to occupy a position of “**overseeing**,” it is their duty to “**shepherd**” the flock; they exercise “**rule**” over others, who in turn are admonished to “**obey them**,” and submit themselves to them, because the elders watch for their souls. Conversely, the members of the church are to be ruled, be overseen, be shepherded, obey them that have the rule over them, and submit themselves. In view of these facts, how could one for a moment seriously entertain the view that elders, as such, have no authority, and may exercise their functions only as others may be willing to follow the example they set? A preacher who, in the face of these unequivocal statements from Holy Writ, can yet contend that elders cannot rule in the congregation, should sympathize greatly with denominational preachers who refuse to accept the plain

IN THIS ISSUE.....

ELDERS’ AUTHORITY OVER A CONGREGATION –GUY N. WOODS.....1
EDITORIAL–2 JOHN 9-11.....2
BROKEN CISTERNS–DANNY DOUGLAS.....6
TRY JESUS–KEN CHUMBLEY.....7

(Continued on Page 3)

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

2 JOHN 9-11

Some time ago, I read the following statement concerning what some believe 2 John 9-11 teaches regarding Christian fellowship. The statement I read is this: "I understand that John teaches that it is a sin to extend the right hand of fellowship to any false teacher that comes directly to me." The brother who made this statement was attempting to justify his opposition to Dave Miller's errors concerning the Re-evaluation and Reconfirmation of elders (as believed and taught by Miller and practiced twice by the Brown Trail Church of Christ in Hurst, Texas—the B.T. church has since recanted), etc., while at the same time continuing to fellowship churches and brethren who have no problem with Miller's unrepented of errors. This brother is a member of this group and he may wish to reveal himself to defend his doctrine or to renounce it. Again for emphasis sake, the above statement affirms that the scriptures teach that direct fellowship with an unrepentant false teacher is sin, but indirect fellowship with the same false teacher is not sin. If the foregoing is true then the following action by churches "A" and "B" is acceptable to God. If church "A" does not believe a false teacher's error, the New Testament authorizes church "A" to extend fellowship to said false teacher. Church "B" publicly refutes said false teacher's error and publicly marks the false teacher for his error, but with God's approval, church "B" may fellowship church "A" on the basis that church "A" does not believe said false teacher's error, even though it fellowships said false teacher. Does the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular teach the aforementioned doctrine?

I affirm that the doctrine of a so-called direct fellowship of a false teacher with faithful Christians as above noted is foreign to the teaching of 2 John 9-11 and to all New Testament teaching regarding Christian fellowship. I also affirm that the doctrine of an indirect fellowship between a false teacher and other Christians as previously noted is foreign to 2 John 9-11 as well as all New Testament teaching regarding Christian fellowship. Furthermore, I affirm that the New Testament teaches Christians are in fellowship with one another or they are not in fellowship with one another; that the New Testament does not teach a sinful direct fellowship and an un sinful indirect fellowship with a false teacher. Would anyone be bold enough to affirm that the scriptures teach that God does not directly fellowship a false teacher, but that He indirectly fellowships a false teacher? Moreover, I affirm that the doctrine that Church "A" is free to fellowship a false teacher upon the condition that Church "A" does not believe the false teacher's error is foreign to 2 John 9-11 as it is foreign to everything the New Testament teaches regarding Christian fellowship. Said false doctrine admits that wheth-

(Continued Bottom of Page 4)

(Continued From Page 1)

significance of the passages touching the plan of salvation! They at least have much in common in their attitude toward the Scriptures.

Lest it should be argued that the words above cited as descriptive of the functions of elders are not to be taken in their primary and literal import, we hasten to present the lexical evidence touching this point.

First, with reference to the word *obey*. Seeing it is our duty to obey the elders (Heb. 13:17), what is the significance of this term? The word thus translated in Heb. 13:17 is *peithesthe*, second personal plural, of the present imperative *peitho*, defined by Bagster to mean, in the middle voice, “to suffer one’s self to be persuaded, to listen to, to obey, to follow.” Green defines it in the same manner, while Thayer says it means “to listen to, obey, yield to, comply with,” and cites this passage in Heb. 13:17 as illustrative of this definition! It follows; therefore, that there can be no doubt that the word *obey* in the passage under consideration has its ordinary meaning of “assent to, yield to, comply with,” etc., in determining our obligation to the elders.

Next, we are to consider the force of the statement, “**them that have the rule over you.**” These words are translated from the participial clause, *tois egoumenois humoon*—literally, “the ones having the rule over you.” The words “**having the rule**” are from *egoumenois*, dative plural of the present participle *egeomai*, defined by Thayer:

to lead, to go before, to be a leader, to rule, command, to have authority over ... leading as respects influence, controlling in counsel, ... with gen. of per. over whom one rules, so of the overseers or leaders of Christian churches.

In illustration of these meanings, Mr. Thayer cites the following: 1 Maccabees 9:30, a military leader, various references in the Greek classics wherein the word is used to indicate any kind of leader, chief, or commander. Green, in his lexicon, lists the following as definitions thereof: “to lead the way, to take the lead, to be chief, to preside, to govern, to rule;” and he cites Acts 14:12; Mat. 2:6; and Acts 7:10 as containing the word in this signification.

Finally, we are to take a glance at the word *submit* as used in the passage under review. Having seen that we are commanded to obey the elders—i.e., listen to them, comply with their requests, and acquiesce in their decisions—we now inquire as to the significance of the word *submit*. It is from the word *upeikete*, second personal plural of the present imperative, *upeikoo*, “to yield, give way; absol. to be submissive, Heb. 13 :17.” (Bagster.) It will be observed that this eminent authority also cites the passage under study as illustrative of the meaning given.

Much more might be offered; this will suffice to show the position scriptural elders hold in the congregation, and the duty of the membership thereto. Let us be exceedingly

careful that we do not find ourselves in the unenviable position of rebellion against God and His servants. Elders, when functioning properly, are engaged in a work divinely authorized, and to oppose them is to oppose God. In matters not involving doctrinal issues one treads on dangerous ground indeed who presumptuously opposes those who watch for our souls. They are overseers; it is our duty, therefore, to be overseen. They are bishops of our souls; it is, hence, our duty to submit our souls to those who thus watch for us. They are shepherds of the flock; and the flock must recognize their leadership and follow them. Finally, they are the ones who rule over us; we are taught to obey such. We cannot do less and be guiltless at the last day. What we are to do when men lacking the qualifications pose as elders is another question. Here we have dealt solely with the duty of the congregation toward scriptural elders (Woods, Guy N., *Questions and Answers Open Forum, Freed-Hardeman College Lectures, Williams Printing, Nashville, TN, 1976, pp. 243-245*).

—Deceased

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10:00: *That They All May Be One*—Jose Gamez

11:00: *One God/One Bible*—Lovell Henry

12:00: LUNCH SERVED BY THE CHURCH

1:30: *One Lord/One Faith*—Jack Stephens

2:30: *One Spirit/One Baptism*—Bruce Stulting

3:30: *One Body/One Hope*—John West

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(Continued From Page 2)

er directly or indirectly, it is scriptural to fellowship a false teacher who refuses to repent. This false doctrine makes a distinction in Christian fellowship that the New Testament does not make. It teaches no cessation of fellowship with an unrepentant false teacher. This is the case because whether fellowship is “direct” or “indirect” one is in fellowship with said false teacher. Any way you cut it, said false doctrine keeps the faithful in fellowship with brethren in sin who will not repent.

It may be asked, “. . .how far do we take this? Is this the ‘Six Degrees of Dave Miller,’ or Phil Sanders, or Mac Deaver, or any others? Do we take it to the Nth degree?” Answer: We take the truth concerning fellowship, or any other New Testament truth, just as far as it logically applies, no matter who, what, when, where, how many it involves, or the cost to us in this life in order for us to consistently apply it to our conduct. Do brethren not understand that it is not a question of “how far we take this?” God does not allow us to determine arbitrarily “how far we take this.” That is the wrong question. The right question is this: How far does the logical application of the totality of God’s truth on any subject take us in our conduct regardless of the demands it places on us, or the sacrifices we must make to be in harmony with the application of said truth in all areas of life to which it applies? Where did anyone get the idea from God’s Word that God is pleased with church members who arbitrarily stop short of the logical conclusion and application of any New Testament truth pertaining to any topic having to do with Godly living?

We are told that we must have balance in our view of fellowship and not allow it to go too far to the right or left. We must not go “to the left so far as to have Max Lucado’s open fellowship,” or so far to the right that we cannot fellowship anyone “who is even remotely a possible fellowshipper of error.”

But, the false doctrine we are examining advocates, permits, sanctions, and defends a Christian who is a “fellowshipper of error,” whether that fellowship is direct or indirect (concepts unknown to the New Testament doctrine of Godly fellowship). Again, notice what this so called direct/indirect fellowship error teaches:

1. Because Church “A” believes a false teacher’s error, it sins if it fellowships said unrepentant false teacher. (Why would not Church “A” be guilty of sin simply by embracing said error?—DPB)?

2. However, with God’s approval Church “B” may fellowship said false teacher because Church “B” does not believe said false teacher’s error.

4. Thus, it is further affirmed that with God’s approval Church “C” may fellowship Church “B,” because it (Church “B”) does not believe said false teacher’s error, even though

Church “B” fellowships said false teacher.

5. Church “C,” with God’s approval, may therefore fellowship Church “B” and Church “B” may fellowship said unrepentant false teacher because Church “B” rejects said false teacher’s error.

How much more crazy can a doctrine be? If the foregoing is correct, then churches may practice it regarding any false teacher or church members living in sin who refuse to repent.

Do we not know that any doctrine that implies a false doctrine is itself false? Since we are to have no fellowship of any kind with a church member who sins and will not repent, then we sin when we knowingly and continuously fellowship an unrepentant false teacher, or unrepentant sinful church members, or churches who knowingly fellowship any false teacher whether said church believes a false teacher’s error or not.

We are then met with the attempt to qualify what is meant by being balanced concerning Christian fellowship. Believing it to be sinful, these brethren, at least at present, do not desire to practice “open fellowship” as Rubel Shelly, et al., are practicing it. But they think some who oppose Shelly and friends are narrowing the boundaries of fellowship more than does the New Testament. However, their efforts to define what they mean by “balanced fellowship” comes down to what I have previously noted—with God’s approval churches may fellowship any church that directly fellowships false teachers as long as said churches fellowshipping the false teachers do not believe the false teacher’s errors. There is not a one of those who believe this nebulous and nefarious doctrine that would attempt to propagate or defend it orally on the polemic platform in a four night debate. But they will continue to practice it because by their conduct they do not have to lose brethren, friends, family, and support money over it. This false doctrine teaches that faithful children of God who oppose and expose a false teacher may with God’s approval extend fellowship to other brethren who support the same unrepentant false teacher as long as said brethren do not believe the false teacher’s doctrine. If the foregoing is “balanced fellowship” then no wonder they call the New Testament truth concerning fellowship unbalanced. I know of no more mendacious doctrine than this so-called “sinful direct, but un sinful indirect” fellowship.

To be balanced in teaching regarding fellowship, or anything else, is to teach and do only what the New Testament authorizes us to do, leaving undone what is not authorized and what is explicitly forbidden. Thus, our obligations to God are enjoined on us by New Testament authorization (Col. 3:17; 2 Cor. 5:7). Moreover, with all of God’s obligations there are options for us from which we are to choose and by which we discharge said obligations. And, there are no options to consider unless first there is an obligation to God that must be discharged. Options by which we discharge our

obligations vary from time to time, congregation to congregation, situation to situation, and circumstances to circumstances. The option chosen must expedite the discharging of the obligation. That is, the option must discharge the obligation in the quickest and best way possible. Therefore, there must be an advantage in the option we choose over other available options whereby we could discharge whatever our obligation to God is.

The foregoing explains wherein we are at liberty to differ in serving God and wherein we must not differ. In matters of obligation, we must believe and practice the exact same things (1 Cor. 1:10). In matters of options (how we expedite our obligations), there can be differences (Acts 15:36-41). “Antis” make certain options obligatory. Thereby, they bind on Christians what God has not bound. “Liberals” loose us from what God in His Word obligates us to do—loosing us from what God has bound on us.

But we are told that what we teach about Christian fellowship puts us in disagreement with what the Lord revealed about the brethren composing the church in Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6). In this passage, we learn there were faithful and unfaithful brethren in the same church. But Jesus declared there were some (no doubt the faithful brethren—Acts 2:42 and 1 John 1:7) in that church who were worthy to wear “**white robes**,” indicating purity of life. However, if faithful brethren were in fellowship with unrepentant sinning members, they would not have been worthy to wear “**white robes**.” We may correctly conclude then, that those worthy to wear “**white robes**” were engaged in an ongoing battle against their unfaithful brethren and not in fellowship with them (1 Tim. 6:12). Indeed, many of us have found ourselves in that position over the years. As gospel preachers, we have been fired because we taught that certain members’ conduct made them unworthy to wear “**white robes**”—that they were lost and needed to repent of their sins. Are we to think that those worthy to wear “**white robes**” then and now did and do not follow the example of the apostle Paul when he withstood Peter to the face because of the latter apostle’s sinful conduct (Gal. 2:11)? Why would anyone attempt to besmirch the good name of those brethren in Sardis, or anywhere else, by saying they were in fellowship (direct or indirect) with those brethren whom the Lord did not consider worthy to wear “**white robes**”? Why would we think that those brethren who are worthy to wear “**white robes**” would not be exposing and refuting the sinful conduct and/or teaching of their erring brethren whom the Lord determined to be unworthy to wear “**white robes**”? Why would we think that those brethren whom the Lord said were worthy to wear “**white robes**” would not be exhorting and urging the church to obey God and practice corrective church discipline on sinful brethren? Faithful brethren are correctly called faithful because they do only what is authorized in the New Testament, leaving undone those things not authorized or explicitly forbidden (Col. 3:17; Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 5:7). Since the Lord said that

certain brethren in the Sardis church were worthy to wear “white robes,” would this not imply that they were practicing all things necessary to be faithful to the Lord (Rom. 16:17, 18; 1 Cor. 5; 1 The. 5:14; Jude 3; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; etc.). What makes us think that because they were members of the Sardis church that this necessitated the faithful to be in fellowship with the unfaithful members of said church? Clearly, as the scriptures reveal, Jesus exhorted the unfaithful brethren in Sardis to repent while they had time to do so (Rev. 3:3; 2 Pet. 3:9). The faithful in the Sardis church could not have been in fellowship with their unrepentant sinful brethren for the Lord said of them, “**Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy**” (Rev. 3:4; 2:10; 1 Cor. 15:58; Rom. 16:17, 18).

Paul commanded Christians, “**And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them**” (Eph. 5:11). “**No fellowship**” means any kind of fellowship. With the foregoing in mind, who will affirm that those brethren described by our Lord in Revelation 3:4 to be worthy to wear “**white robes**” were practicing fellowship of any kind with their brethren whom the Lord judged unworthy to wear “**white robes**”? For Christians to be worthy to wear “**white robes**” we must have no fellowship with brethren who refuse to repent of their sins. To do so, would be to partake of their evil deeds and, therefore, also partake of the eternal consequences of their unrepented of sinful conduct.

—David P. Brown, Editor

EDITORIAL COMMENT

[The foregoing article concerning Christian fellowship was written several years ago. I was reminded of it when recently it was printed on the Internet.

The message of this article is needed as much or more today than when it was originally printed. However, those brethren who needed and continue to need its rebuke have not changed. Indeed, it seems that even more brethren have embraced the false concept of fellowship exposed and refuted in said article. Furthermore, and sadly, we did not expect them to receive the article’s admonition when it was originally published and the same is the case today. That is the case because they were then, and continue to be, unwilling to make the sacrifices in their lives necessary to abide in the New Testament’s teaching regarding the same. Simply put, their pride, their love of the praises of men, their love for their fleshly families, their fear of losing money, and their fear of having people they deem to be somewhat in the church speaking against them mean more to them than does the Word of God that will judge them in the last day—at least such is the case with them on the fellowship issue (John 12:48; 2 Cor. 5:10; Ecc. 12:13, 14). Nevertheless, the truth regarding the same has been taught on more than one occasion and through different venues. Thus, they are without excuse.—DPB]

BROKEN CISTERNS

Jeremiah 2:9-13, 19

Danny Douglas

Things which cannot profit—(Jeremiah 2:11, 2:8, 7:8, 12:13, 16:19, 23:32, Mark 8:36-37, 1 Samuel 12:21).

1. Anytime we turn from God and spiritual things to sin and the things of the world, we are doing what God's people of old were guilty of!

For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13).

2. Jesus Christ is the source of salvation and eternal life, the source of Living Water (John 4:10-14; 7:37). Examples today of man turning from God to “**broken cisterns**”—

- Have turned from Bible reading and prayer in school to the teaching of foolish and ungodly evolution; the broken cistern of evolution! (Gen. 1:1; Rom. 1:18-25; Psa. 14:1; 53:1).

- Have turned from a “thus saith the Lord” to “I think” or “man says”—vain and foolish man-made religion; the broken cistern of the doctrines and philosophies of man (Col. 2:8).

- Have turned from being able to take man at his word (a man's word is his bond)—to lying, cheating, and stealing; the broken cistern of dishonesty! (Eph. 4:25).

- Have turned from sincere and devout worship to that which tickles the ears and entertains people; the broken cistern of vain human worship (2 Tim. 4:3-4; Mat. 15:9).

- Have turned from purity and decency to vulgarity and immodesty—lasciviousness; the broken cistern of immorality (Gal. 5:19-21).

- Have turned from loving thy neighbor as thyself unto self-centered and uncaring ways; the broken cistern of selfishness (Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:25-37).

- Have turned from resisting temptation to please God unto giving in to lust to please oneself; the broken cistern of lust (2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 5:19-21).

- Have turned from loving the truth of God's Word to craving that which suits our fancy; the broken cistern of itching ears (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

- Have turned from sacrificial giving to giving God that which is blemished and left overs; the broken cistern of holding back that which is due unto God (2 Cor. 9:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Mal. 1:8).

- Have turned from loving spiritual things and spiritual-mindedness to fleshly ways and greed; the broken cistern

of carnal-mindedness (Rom. 8:6-7; Col. 3:1-2).

- Have turned from friendliness and kindness to hard-heartedness and a proud look; the broken cistern of foolish pride (Eph. 4:31-32; Pro. 6:16-19).

- Have turned from hospitality and sharing to hoarding up and a closed door; the broken cistern of not sharing and not being hospitable (Heb. 13:1-2; Acts 2:42-47; 1 John 3:16-18).

- Have turned from book, chapter and verse preaching to fables and myths; the broken cistern of loving falsehood over truth (2 Tim. 4:1-4; 2 The. 2:9-12).

- Have turned from forgiveness and mercy to hatefulness and unforgiveness; the broken cistern of unmercifulness (Rom. 1:29-32).

- Have turned from gratitude to ingratitude; the broken cistern of unthankfulness (2 Tim. 3:1-4; Rom. 1:21).

- Have turned from a life of prayer and talking to God to a life of trusting in self; the broken cistern of self-reliance (1 Tim. 6:17).

- Have turned from looking to the Word of God to trusting in personal feelings and desires; the broken cistern of leaning to one's own understanding (Pro. 3:3-7).

- Have turned from obedience to the Scriptures to faith alone; the broken cistern of faith only (Jam. 2:14-26).

- Have turned from respect and honor for parents and the elderly to forgetfulness and neglect; the broken cistern of disrespect (Eph. 6:1-3; Pro. 23:22).

- Have turned from reverence for God and His high and holy name to irreverence and taking God's name in vain; the broken cistern of irreverence for God (Mat. 6:9; Jer. 2:19; Ecc. 12:13-14).

- Have turned from serving and helping to the desire to be served and catered to; the broken cistern of self-servingness (2 Tim. 3:1-4).

- Have turned from a broken and contrite heart to a stubborn and obstinate heart; the broken cistern of self-will (2 Tim. 3:1-4).

- Have turned from hard work and diligence to laziness and ease; the broken cistern of slothfulness (Rom. 12:11).

- Have turned from zeal and earnestness to indifference; the broken cistern of lukewarmness (Rev. 3:15-17; Heb. 2:3; Jam. 4:17).

- Have turned from urgency and haste in doing God’s will to procrastination and carelessness; the broken cistern of a false sense of security (Pro. 27:1; 2 Cor. 6:2).
- Have turned from loving God to loving pleasures; the broken cistern of worldliness (1 John 2:15-17).
- From the soul-saving Gospel of Christ to the commandments of men that turn from the truth; the broken cistern of the damnable (Mat. 15:9; 2 Pet. 2:1).
- Have turned from the sanctity of life to abortion and euthanasia; the broken cistern of murder! (Pro. 6:16-19; Gal. 5:19-21).
- Have turned from their first love of Christ to the sin of lacking love; the broken cistern of not having love (Rev. 2:4-5; 1 Cor. 13).
- Have turned from loving a good name to wayward

living; the broken cistern of walking uncircumspectly (Eph. 5:15-17; Pro. 22:1).

- Have turned away from bringing up a child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord to bringing them up according to worldly standards; the broken cistern of earthly standards (Eph. 6:4).
- Have turned from a close and loving home to a divided home with strife; the broken cistern of a divided house (Mark 3:25).
- Have turned from love and purity to fornication and adultery; the broken cistern of treachery and immorality (Heb. 13:4; Mal. 2:14-16; 1 Cor. 6:18-20; Gal. 5:19-21; Mat. 19:3-9).

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TRY JESUS

Ken Chumbley

The bumper sticker said, “Try Jesus, if you don’t like him, the devil will always welcome you back.” The concept of one trying Jesus has much to merit it.

However, there is a problem with that phraseology. Jesus is not some food that one tries to see if he likes it. I am sure that we have all tried something new and decided that for some reason we did not like it. Jesus, however, is in a completely different category. Before one can really try Jesus, he must come to believe that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus said, **“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins”** (John 8:24). Further, one must make the good confession, **“And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God”** (Acts 2:37). Thus, in order to “try Jesus” one must make a commitment to Him. Furthermore, lest any get the idea that belief is all that is necessary, one must repent of his sins and be baptized (immersed) into Christ for the forgiveness of his sins in order to be saved and added by the Lord to His church (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38, 41; 22:16; Mark 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21; etc.). When one has become a Christian, only then can he truly “try Jesus” by living in harmony with His will. If one is not willing to live the kind of life that Jesus commands in His words, then he is not willing to “try Jesus.” One cannot expect the blessings of the Christian life without being willing to live according to the commandments of Jesus. Our Lord said, **“If ye love me, keep my commandments”** (John 14:15).

However, the second part of the statement on the bumper sticker surprised me. Recognizing that the source from

whence the bumper sticker was obtained and judging by other stickers, etc., on the truck would indicate that it came from a source that believes the doctrine of “once saved, always saved” or “once in grace, always in grace.” If one believes that doctrine, how could they possibly say that the individual that “tries” Jesus can go back to the devil if he does not like Christ? If, according to that false theology, one has become a Christian in order to “try Jesus” then he continues in a saved state regardless of what he might do for such an individual, according to that false theology, cannot be lost.

On the other hand, if the intent of the bumper sticker is to encourage people to “try Jesus” without coming to faith in Him, even in accordance with their false theology of faith only or faith alone, then they are encouraging people to think that they can enjoy the benefits of Christianity without any form of commitment to the Christ.

We should never encourage people to simply “try Jesus” but rather we should teach them the necessity of obedience to the Gospel and commitment to living the Christian Life. The only way one can experience the blessing of salvation in Christ and the blessings of the Christian life is for one to be **“in Christ”** and we get into Him when we are baptized into Him (Gal. 3:27). If you are not a Christian, we would urge you to believe that Jesus is the Christ, repent of your sins, confess the name of Jesus before men, and then be baptized into Him for the remission of your sins.

—Deceased



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