

# Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

## THE DIVINE NATURE AND FELLOWSHIP<sup>1</sup>

Dub McClish

### INTRODUCTION

The material found in 2 Peter 1:1–11 is significant in helping the Christian understand his relationship both to God and to his fellow man. Verse 4 expresses the consummation of all of God’s efforts for and among men—that men might become partakers of His nature. Here is man at his zenith: not living on the animal level or merely on the civilized human level, but on the Divine level. Such an incomparable consideration is fraught with unparalleled implications.

### EXPOSITION OF THE TEXT

What does it mean to “**become partakers of the divine nature**”?<sup>2</sup> *Koinonos*, translated “partakers,” occurs fourteen times in the New Testament, including its compound forms. This word indicates common sharing and participation between two or more beings in whatever element the context identifies, including both persons and things. It refers to partnership in business (Luke 15:10) and in the Lord’s work (2 Cor. 8:23). It refers to participation in evil (Mat. 23:30), in sufferings for Christ’s sake (Heb. 10:33), and in the glory that awaits the faithful (1 Pet. 5:1). It is rendered “communion” in reference to demon worship (1 Cor. 10:18, 20). Thus our text says that we can participate and share in God’s nature in some way.

*Divine*, built on *theos*, is an adjective meaning “that which pertains to God.” It appears without the article in the Greek text and would literally read, “partakers of divine nature” rather than “the divine nature.”

*Nature* is a word described by the lexicons as essence, native condition, natural characteristics. On this text, Thayer comments: “The holiness distinctive of the divine nature is espe-

cially referred to.”<sup>3</sup> It is obvious that man does not and cannot partake in the transcendent “omni-traits” of Deity. It is in God’s moral attributes that men have the privilege (and obligation) of sharing: “**Ye shall be holy; for I am holy**” (1 Pet. 1:16). Is this sharing in God’s nature present or future? The apostle states that through God’s precious and exceeding great promises we “**may become partakers of the divine nature**” (2 Pet. 1:4). This language admittedly sounds futuristic in tense. However, *...ye may become...* is an aorist imperative, rather than a future tense form of *ginomai*, meaning “to become or be made anything.” The aorist is the simple past tense of the Greek and when used in the imperative mood, refers to action involved without reference to its duration or repetition. The future sound of the verb results from the basic meaning of the verb itself, rather than from its tense. Paul wrote the following parallel thought: “**seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him**” (Col. 3:9–10, emp. DM).

It appears certain, therefore, that Peter is talking about a relationship into which these brethren had already come: “**having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust,**” the remainder of the verse reads. Escaping a lust-corrupted world to partake of God’s nature is but a description of repenting of sin, obeying the Gospel, and living as a child of God. This partaking of God’s nature is one in which His people must continue to progress, as succeeding verses show (vss. 5–11). While we enjoy this fellowship in the holy nature of Deity in this life, there is obviously a sense in which we will partake of His nature more fully in the eternal realm: “**Beloved, now are we children, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that,**

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# Contending FOR THE Faith™

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

### **2 JOHN 9-11**

Recently I read the following statement concerning what some believe 2 John 9-11 teaches regarding Christian fellowship. The statement is: "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." This doctrine teaches that **direct** fellowship with an unrepentant false teacher is sin, but **indirect** fellowship with a false teacher is not sin. If church A does not believe a false teacher's error, with God's approval church A may extend fellowship to said false teacher. Church B publicly refutes said false teacher's 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.

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*. Moreover, I affirm 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 well as all New Testament teaching regarding Christian fellowship. Said doctrine admits that whether 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 other error? 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 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."

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7:00 PM *Without God there is no Objective Absolute Moral Standard*—**Michael Hatcher**  
8:00 PM *Civil Government and Morality*—**Dub McClish**

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9:00 AM *Dishonesty*—**Wayne Blake**  
10:00 AM *Homosexuality*—**Geoff Litke**  
11:00 AM *Dancing and Immodest Apparel*—**Andy Hastings**  
*Lunch Break*  
1:30 PM *God's Institution of Marriage*—**Mark Townsend**  
2:30 PM *Divorce and Remarriage*—**Bruce Stulting**  
3:30 PM *Domestic Violence*—**John West**

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22**

9:30 AM *Abortion*—**Philip Schrei**  
10:30 AM *Beverage Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use*—**Michael Hatcher**  
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But, the false doctrine we are examining advocates, permits, sanctions, and defends a Christian who is a “fellowship of error,” whether that fellowship is direct or indirect. 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, therefore, with God’s approval may 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 and refusing 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. These brethren do not desire to practice “open fellowship” such as

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# VIRGIN BIRTH—ONLY BEGOTTEN # 2

Don Tarbet

## “AFTER ITS KIND”

I recently read about an eating establishment called, “One of a Kind Burgers and Fries.” Then within hours, I heard on TV about the huge Waggoner Ranch in Texas being advertised for sale, as a “one of a kind ranch.” Later, I saw the picture of a blue lobster that had been found which was obviously “one of a kind.” After having been studying the claim that Jesus was not the “only begotten Son” of God, but was “only” or “one of a kind,” an idea came to my mind. I contacted several directors of our schools of preaching, and teachers of the Greek language, and asked them if one were to take the expression “one of a kind,” (by itself, and not in the context of Jesus’ birth), and go backward to the Greek language, what Greek word or words would best express that idea. Of all the replies, virtually half of them told me it would be *monos* or *monon*. The other half said that the word *monogenes* would best describe it. None of this group explained why the “genes” would be necessary to describe any “kind” of something.

The word *kind* has varied meanings in the scripture. The first use is in Genesis 1:12, where God stated that the trees were to reproduce after their kind. The Hebrew word there is *min*, that is translated *genos* in the *Septuagint* of the Old Testament, and in other literature. This refers to the distinctive nature of likeness, or offspring or product being reproduced. This is the word being used in John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18 and 1 John 4:9 in reference to Jesus. Other words are used in Hebrew and in Greek to describe other items that are not being reproduced, such as “**kinds of tongues**” (1 Cor. 12:20). So, *kind* is too broad of a word to use in the expression *one of a kind* in reference to the nature of Jesus in His birth, just as *unique* is too broad of an expression, especially without noting why something or someone is unique.

In the matter of reproducing after its kind, it should be noted that the mature product always is before its reproduction. In the creation, the trees were created *mature*, and then they could reproduce after their kind. The parent always comes before the offspring. In the matter of the Father and the Son of God, the Father determined that deity would become flesh to redeem man. The One we think of as God (the Father) was to remain in heaven, while the One coming to earth (the Word, John 1:1-3, 14) would be the Son, in this “Father—Son” relationship as the Scheme of Redemption was put into motion. Deity that came to earth would obviously remain deity (the Son of God), but would take on flesh to be the Son of man. God gave this deity a body as it pleased Him

(Heb. 10:5). The means of His coming to the earth would be through the “birth” process. The woman who would bear Him would have no man to cause conception, but the Spirit would come upon her, causing a conception, and one born would be the Son of the Highest, or Son of God (Luke 1:31-35). He was to be “begotten” in the manner prescribed by the angel who addressed Mary. No wonder He would be referred to as “**the only begotten Son of God.**”

*Monogenes* is a compound word, made up of *monos* and *genos*, and both words mean something different. If *monos* means “only,” why add *genos* to it to make them both mean “only”? If *genos* does not change the meaning of *monos*, it is worthless to use. If it does allude to the nature of Jesus, as of the “**divine nature**” (2 Pet. 1:4), or “deity,” then *monos* would actually be incorrect in this statement, for Jesus was not the only One with that divine nature, for the Father is also of the same. As Michael Marlowe wrote, “The biological metaphor, in which the Son (and only the Son) shares the genus of the Father, conveys the idea that Jesus Christ is a true genetic Son, having the same nature as the Father.”<sup>1</sup> So, Christ is not the “only divine one,” or “unique” in His deity, but is the “offspring” of the Father, having been begotten of Him through Mary. Marlowe continues, “John is not saying that the Son is ‘one of a kind.’” He is saying that Christ is the second of a kind, uniquely sharing the genus of the Father, because he is the only begotten of the Father.”<sup>2</sup>

Proponents of the claim that Jesus is the “only” Son, usually maintain that Jerome, who lived in the 4th and 5th centuries, changed the original Latin word *unicus* to *unigenitus* (meaning “only begotten”) in his translation of the *Latin Vulgate*. This misconception has caused several writers to be misled into blaming Jerome for our confusion. Such believers in this conception absolutely forget about some other writers who lived before Jerome, who did use the word *unigenitus*. Irenaeus, who wrote *Against Heresies* (in the second century—some 200 years before Jerome, speaks of the “only begotten Son” from the word *unigenitus* (Vol. IV, 20, 6). Then, there was the *Nicean Creed* of 325 A.D. which more than once speaks of “the only begotten” Son of God. These two pieces of evidence prove conclusively that Jerome is not the father of “the begotten” concept, but it was a truth written and read long before his time. This means that the basis for “unique” is fraudulent, and should not be believed. The search for truth should cause us to go back as far as we can in the use of words.

Something of very special interest is noted in all three contexts of John’s reference to the only begotten Son of God. *First*, in John 1:12-13, he refers to believers who are “born” (Gr. *gennao*) of God, and based upon that revelation

of this being from the “**will of God,**” immediately refers to the conception of Jesus (vs. 14). *Second*, in John 3:3-7, John speaks of those who are “**born again**” (Gr. *gennao*) of the Spirit and water, and immediately speaks twice of Jesus having been “**begotten**” of God (vss. 16, 18). *Third*, in 1 John 4:7 John refers to believers who are “born of God” (Gr. *gennao*), and immediately refers to Jesus as the “begotten” of the Father (vs. 9). Is it not interesting to note how John associates both begettals in the same context—every time he writes of the “begotten” Son of God? Jesus and Christians are all begotten of God. Jesus was begotten of God by means of the Spirit overshadowing Mary to cause her conception to bring about His birth. He is the “only” One ever, or ever to be, begotten in this manner. Today, Christians are begotten of God through another action of the Spirit in the word of the Gospel. The Spirit is involved in all these births, while it was a direct action in Luke 1:31-35, and an indirect action through the word of God in the lives of believers from the first century on. Paul said he had “**begotten**” the Corinthians through the Gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). James said God begets us through the word (Jam. 1:18). Peter said we are born (begotten, *ASV*) again of “**incorruptible seed, the word of God**” (1 Pet. 1:23). The comparison is surely not accidental, but confirming of Jesus’ incarnation.

#### DEBATE ON “MONOGENES”

One of the most notable scholars of the past two centuries was a man by the name of Geerhardus Vos. He wrote a great deal about the nature of Jesus and His revelation of Himself. One book titled *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus* was first published in 1926. Conservative scholars have long held his writings in high esteem when it comes to the language of the New Testament. This book was prefaced in the first edition in 1926, and the second edition came out in 1953 under the editorship of Johannes G. Vos, the son of the original author. The book basically consists somewhat of a “debate” over various doctrinal points relative to the divinity of Jesus Christ and His previous relationship with God in eternity before His mission on earth. Vos presents his material in somewhat of a “debate” mode, presenting virtually every conceivable view point regarding these matters, and then defending and refuting them in such a way as to bring out and emphasize biblical truth on each point. Vos’ material is especially interesting on the subject of *monogenes*, the word used in scripture pertaining to the incarnation of Jesus as an infant. Vos presents and scrutinizes the pros and cons of each point presented. His words present a powerful defense of the fact that Jesus was “the only begotten of God” in His making His appearance on earth in the scheme of redemption. The facts of that incarnation are magnified by Vos.

In chapter 12, on “The Sonship of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel,” he alludes to John 1:13 on John’s writings about “birth.” The text reads (regarding those who believe on the name of Jesus), “**Which were born, not of blood, nor of**

**the will of man, but of God.**” Then Vos states,

The statement of 1:13 contains, either by implication or explicitly (which of the two is the case depends on which of the variant readings is adopted as the authentic text), the affirmation of the supernatural introduction of Jesus into the world” (209).

This is quickly followed by one of the longer quotes we will take from the book, but I believe it is essential to the entire approach. He states:

The evangelist here describes the manner of birth of those believing on the name of the Logos as a birth “not of bloods (plural, *haimaton*), nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” On the ordinary reading of the text, which at the beginning of verse 13 has *egennethesan* (“who were born”), this is the correct translation. But this is such an extraordinary way of characterizing the birth of believers as to render the conclusion well-nigh unavoidable that the writer in penning it must have had his eye on some other extraordinary birth, the remarkable features of which he found reproduced, as it were, in the spiritual birth of believers.

And this analogous, archetypal event, in conformity to which he found the birth of believers to have been fashioned, could only have been the birth by which the Logos became flesh. Nor does this conclusion rest merely on the general impression conveyed by the language of the statement; it is favored—not to say demanded—by certain features in the phraseology itself (209, 210).

Then Vos continues:

The threefold turn given to the thought of a possible opposite to a birth from God – “not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man” – requires a special motive for its use. This special motive cannot be found in the desire to emphasize the supernaturalness in general of the birth of believers. For that purpose the mere antithesis of “not of the flesh, but of God” would have been fully sufficient. “The flesh” over against “God” means nature over against super-nature. Because in the present case this general form of the antithesis did not satisfy the writer, since he wished to define the precise mode of the super-nature involved, he was careful to characterize the contrast in a most pointed threefold form: it was a birth, with which neither “bloods,” nor “the will of the flesh,” nor “the will of man” had anything to do (210).

Then Vos writes, “The ordinary contrast is between “flesh and blood” on the one hand, and “God” on the other” (210). “All this indicates that for the writer the main emphasis rests on the exclusion of blood from the process of birth that furnished him with the analogy for the birth of believers” (210, 211). God would have His part, but “the writer wished to compare the birth or begetting of believers with an analogon in which the male factor played no role whatsoever” (211). “Even with the reading retained, the birth of Jesus with the paternity element eliminated must be alluded to by way of implied comparison” (211). “We shall now proceed to ascertain what light is cast upon the sonship of Jesus by the term *Monogenes*” (211). “We must, therefore, keep

open the possibility that the term monogenes has to teach us something about the uniqueness of the provenience of Jesus” (213).

With these observations by Vos on John 1:13, we now note the language of John 1:14. **“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”** Now Vos continues,

Two reasons therefore, are mentioned for determining the standard of the glory of Christ: first, that it is a glory of a monogenes, and secondly, that it is a glory received from the Father” (216). “The whole, therefore, might plausibly be paraphrased as follows: such a glory as the Only begotten would have in virtue of His begetting or birth, and such as He would derive from the Father” (216). “It is clear that the ability of the Son to declare God, to explain what monogenes serves, is not so well accounted for by ‘Only Son’ as by ‘Only begotten Son’ (216).

In the general epistle of 1 John, John uses the Greek word *gennao* some six (6) times in reference to **“believers”** having been begotten, in the context of Jesus being the **“only begotten Son”** of God, in 1 John 4:9. These references are in 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18. The word is translated “born” in the *KJV*, but is translated **“begotten”** in the *ASV*, in each of these six references. Then, the one time *monogenes* is found in the same book, it refers to Jesus, suggesting that Jesus’ begetting is distinguished from believers’ begetting. John wrote, **“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him”** (4:9). So, the context of 1 John is much like that of John 1 in the Gospel record. Concerning the idea of “begetting” in the parallel, Vos states:

In 3:9 and 5:1 the idea of “begetting” is unequivocally expressed, in the latter through the use of the active aorist participle *gennesanta*, and in the former through the mention of the sperma (“seed”) of God. In the light of those two references the more or less ambiguous passages, 2:29; 4:7 and 5:4, will have to be interpreted, and finally, 5:18 likewise. The idea of a divine generation being thus prominent in the First Epistle of John, this cannot but create a presumption in favor of finding this idea in the gospel in 1:13, 18 and 3:3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and in the three passages where *monogenes* occurs (218).

Vos then continues:

And the parallelism between believers and Christ pervading the Gospel requires us to understand that as believers are “begotten of God,” so Christ also is. The emergence of *monogenes* in both contexts where this idea of the “begetting” of believers occurs fixes the meaning of the word, with tolerable certainty, as “Only begotten” (218).

God’s *monogenes* was by the Spirit who overshadowed Mary and planted the “seed,” so as to cause the only One who would ever conceive in this way, to be born. This compares to our being begotten, also by the Spirit, but through

the word of God (1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Pet. 1:23; Jam. 1:18).

“[T]he more conservative and apologetic exegetes of the Gospel incline towards attaching *monogenes* to the incarnation” (218, 219). “If *monogenes* be related to the incarnate state, the sonship as such will have to receive the same reference” (219).

In summarizing the arguments of Vos, the following paragraph is being presented. The *theos* of the Greek text of John 1:14,

“would be derived from the pre-existent state, but the *monogenes* character would be derived from the incarnation” (219). “The point at which the term *Monogenes* is introduced in the Prologue has been deemed significant at indicating the time when Jesus became the *Monogenes*. The point is at 1:14, immediately after the reporting of the event ‘the Word became flesh’” (223). “The recognition of it as such a glory as only the *Monogenes* could receive from the Father, could not take place until the incarnation had occurred” (223). “*Monogenes* in 1:14 has more force if connected with the incarnation than if placed back of it” (223). “The context in Chapters 1 and 3 favors the reference to the supernatural human birth of Jesus, because in close proximity the new birth, or the birth from above, of believers is spoken of, and some analogy between this and the *Monogenes* birth seems to lie in the mind of the writer or speaker” (224). Now this analogy would more naturally suggest itself between two supernatural historical acts than between two acts of which the one lay in the transcendental, eternal world, and the other in the sphere of time” (224). In other words, Vos is saying that Jesus was not begotten in eternity as the Word, but when He came to earth and became the Son of God, as the “only begotten of the Father.”

With this we concur. Let us give glory to Him that God has revealed in the scripture.

### TRULY, AN AMAZING PROPHECY

A thousand years before the coming of Jesus into the world, the Psalmist David gives an amazing prophecy of the Messiah and the coming kingdom, in the second Psalm. After speaking of the raging of God’s enemies, the Lord speaks of His viewing their futile efforts to prevent His divine rule in His kingdom. He is pictured as laughing at their vain efforts, like an adult laughs at a small child trying to take him down. In spite of all these efforts, they will not keep Him from setting His king upon the throne. This is more than a prophecy of David himself, or Solomon his son, but its ultimate application is seen in the New Testament regarding Jesus our Savior. Verse seven (7) reads, **“I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.”** As the “Son,” He would be placed on the throne. This would be after He had been begotten. The word *day* has puzzled students of scripture for ages. Was the day referring to “eternity” itself, or a particular time? Some argue that was in the eternal realm before the earth began, thus making Christ having been “begotten” as the Son, before time even began.

With reference to two passages in the New Testament that quote Psalms 2:7 (Heb. 1:5 and 5:5) T. Rees, in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, on page 426, states, “Commentators differ as to whether the act of begetting in these two passages is in (a) the eternal generation, or (b) the incarnation in time, or (c) the resurrection and ascension.” Rees combines the resurrection and ascension together. Other writers separate the two and maintain that Jesus was “begotten” at the resurrection, and even twice after His ascension—when He was crowned King, and when He was ordained the High Priest, as if they were separate events regarding a “begettal.” Rees and others seem somewhat uncertain, as the word “seems” is often used to describe them. McCord and others make a distinction. Just because Psalm 2:7 is quoted in the New Testament in more than one context does not mean that the begettal is taking place at and ordination.

Many conservative thinkers and writers are more confident that the application of Psalm 2:7 in the New Testament is merely identifying the one being raised, crowned, and ordained, as the One who had already been *begotten* by the Father—in His incarnation. The words *beget*, *begat*, and “begotten” always apply literally to the process of a bringing forth of a child into the world, most usually the “father-son” relationship being formed. In the New Testament, it is used figuratively to the process of one receiving the word of God as a part of the “new birth.” We need to remember that before there can be a “figurative” application of a word, the “literal” must exist. For instance, the words *adultery* and *fornication*, based on the literal acts, are used to describe those who betray God and turn to idols or false religion. God pictures His bride, Israel, as having committed adultery with stones, as a wife would commit adultery with another man (Jer. 3:8-9). There has to be some kind of similarity between two things in order to make a proper application of something, based on the literal. There is such a similarity relating to literal begetting and spiritual begetting, but we see absolutely no similarity or connection between a “begettal” and the resurrection, coronation, and ordination of Jesus. “A figure of something should reflect the original image in some way. Just HOW does (a) an eternal existence of One, or (b) resurrection of Jesus from the dead, or (c) The coronation of Jesus as king, or (d) The ordaining of Jesus as a High Priest, IN ANY WAY REFLECT A REAL BEGETTAL???? This a point that must be recognized as the truth on this subject shines forth.”

In the “new birth,” the seed (word of God) is sown or planted in the hearts of men and women, and it ultimately produces after its kind. Paul said he had begotten the Corinthians through the gospel. Peter said one is begotten through the incorruptible seed of the “**word of God**” (1 Pet. 1:23). James declared that God “begets” through the word (Jam. 1:18). Thus, in the new birth, there is the role of the Spirit through the word, and the delivery of the new babe in Christ

into the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5; Col. 1:13). With reference to Jesus, it was said that the Spirit would overshadow Mary, and cause her to conceive, and bring forth a child who would be named “**Jesus,**” and He would be called the Son of the Highest (Luke 1:31-35). Thus, Jesus’ appearance on earth involved a “begetting.” Five times in the New Testament, Jesus is properly referred to as “**the only begotten Son of God**” or “**the begotten of the Father.**” Then, there are other references to His being “begotten,” where He is not called the “only begotten,” but simply “the begotten.”

The *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary* states:

In Acts 13:37, Paul’s quotation does not imply an application of this passage to the resurrection: for “raised up” in Acts 13:33 is used in Acts 2:30; 3:22, etc., to denote **bringing Him into being as a man**; (emp. DWT) and not that of resurrection.”

Bear in mind that Psalms 2:7 first refers to “**the decree**” which alludes to a covenant or plan or purpose of the coming of the “Son” in the flesh—His incarnation, which plan or decree that it was to be done, certainly involved a beginning, at the begettal. The times it is quoted in the New Testament in connection with the resurrection, coronation, and ordination as High Priest, are obviously stated to identify the One involved, as the One who had been begotten (prior to His birth to the virgin Mary). If, in each instance, there was a begettal “that day” (literally), it would seem strange indeed that there were three other begettals (relating to a birth) for One Person—Jesus.

In checking many of the versions or translations of Psalm 2:7, you will find that over half (50%) of them invariably use the word *begotten* for the original word *gen-nao* (so rendered in the *Septuagint* Greek translation of the Old Testament, the translation in existence during the life of Jesus on earth). Obviously, a majority of the translators consistently saw that “begotten” is the best word to be used. Too bad that those scholars did not have access to some of the “scholarship” in the brotherhood today. Regarding the word *day* of Psalm 2:7, the *Pulpit Commentary* on Psalms (Vol. 8, page 11) states:

If it be asked, “Which day?” the answer would seem to be, the day when Christ commenced his redemptive work: then the Father “**committed all judgment**”—all dominion over creation—“**to the Son**” (John vs. 22), gave him, as it were, a new existence, a new sphere, the throne of the world, and of all that is or that ever will be, in it.

According to the “**decree**” the Word was to become the Son of God, and from that “sonship” He would become King and High Priest. The two offices are always together in the scheme of redemption. Zechariah 6:12 declares that the Branch (Jesus) was to sit and rule on His throne. When He became King, he was automatically ordained as our High Priest in heaven. The two positions are always (from their beginning) simultaneous His “**dominion**” (given to Him

when He went before the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:13-14) began, and He has always been a Priest on His throne as King. The Hebrew writer stated, **“We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.”** (Heb. 8:1). Thus, when Jesus began His reign as King, He immediately and automatically began His role as High Priest. One did not exist without the other. So, the “theory” that Jesus was “begotten twice” (once when crowned King, and another time when ordained as High Priest) is fallacious—it simply did not occur in that manner.

In *Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible* (Bible Study Tools. Google), there is found this statement: “He was a Son, previous to his being Prophet, Priest, and King; and his office is not the foundation of his sonship, but his sonship is the foundation of his office.” We concur with this without question.

An interesting thing is taking place at the time of this writing. It has been announced that the Waldorf Hotel in New York City is being sold to a Chinese group for the sum of \$2.95 billion. The television news announced that this hotel, with the enormous size of the price being paid, is “one of a kind” transaction. Would the Greeks say it was a *monogenes* transaction? Doubtful! However, some “scholars” just might do so, if put on the spot. With reference to Jesus being born “one of a kind,” that simply does not fit. If we use the word *kind* in general, just how was He “one of a kind?” He was born physically like every one else, but, (a) His conception was special, and (b) His mother was different, in that she was a virgin, and had not known man sexually. These two points should not be forgotten. These are the only reasons Jesus was “unique.” Now, if we use the word *kind* with reference to His “divine nature,” Jesus was not “one of a kind” at that point, for there was also the Father and the Holy Spirit who were and are of the “divine nature.” So, Jesus was not “unique” in this sense either. If we say He was the “only Son” God ever had, we err there too. God had other sons, such as the angels (who are called such in scripture), and then there was Adam, who is said to be “the son of God” (Luke 3:38). So, the only way Jesus was *monogenes* was in

His “incarnation”—when Mary, a virgin, conceived Him of the Holy Spirit.

Just to say “Jesus was unique” does not tell how He was unique. Does this mean that He was “unique” because He was “unique?” Such is to dodge the issue. One may say, “I don’t go out in the dark at night, because I am afraid” is a dodge. Just why is that one “afraid?” Is he “afraid because he is afraid?” Certainly not! There has to be a “reason” why he is “afraid,” and that might be because he is afraid of ghosts or wild dogs, or because his vision is impaired. Just to say “he is afraid because he is afraid” is absurd. Just so, to say “Jesus is unique because He is unique” is just as absurd. Why not tell why he is “unique.” John tells us why.

Many gospel preachers have declared that the Lord’s church is “different” or “unique. But, not one such sermon was delivered without showing why it is “unique.” Does one just get up and say, “The church of Christ is unique because it is unique” or does one tell why it is unique? To ask this question is to answer it. The church of Christ is unique because of its purchase price, its adherence only to the scripture, its scriptural worship, and its name identification. Just so, we agree wholeheartedly that Jesus is “unique,” but He is such because of two things: (1) His miraculous conception, and (2) His virgin birth. Why not leave the references to His being the “only begotten Son” in place. He is the “only” one ever conceived by the Holy Spirit, directly from God, and that through a virgin, that there ever was or shall be. There will never again be another like Him. He is the “only” one ever “begotten” in this manner. When He thus came into the world, John says they **“beheld is glory.”** He is different. He is the glorious Son of God in the manner described, and not just some man who came along through the natural birth process that God decided to use as His son.

#### Works Cited

1. Michael Marlowe, *The Only Begotten Son*, www.biblesearcher.com
2. Ibid.
3. Geerhardus Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, R & R Publishing, Phillipsburg, New Hampshire, 1953.

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(Continued From Bottom of Page 3)

Rubel Shelly, et al., and declare such fellowship to be sinful. But they think some have drawn the lines of fellowship too narrow. 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 fellowshiping 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. But they will continue to practice it because they do not have to lose brethren, friends, family, and 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 an 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.

To be balanced in teaching, fellowship, or anything else is to 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, and place to place. 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 to 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 obligatory, we *must* believe and practice the same things (1 Cor. 1:10). In matters of options (how we expedite our obligations), *there can be differences* (Acts 15:36-41). “Anties” make certain options obligatory. Thereby, they bind on Christians what God has not bound. “Liberals” loose us from what God in His Word has bound on us.

But we are told that what we teach about Christian fellowship puts us in disagreement with Revelation 3:1-6. Herein, we learn

there were faithful brethren and unfaithful brethren in the same church. But Jesus declared there were some in that church who were worthy to wear “white robes,” indicating purity. 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 that those worthy to wear “white robes” were engaged in an ongoing battle against their unfaithful brethren. They were exposing and refuting their errors and urging corrective church discipline. This is what the faithful are taught to do (Rom. 16:17, 18; 1 Cor. 5; 1 The. 5:14; Jude 3, etc.). Clearly, Jesus exhorted the unfaithful brethren to repent while they had time to do so (2 Pet. 3:9). The faithful in the Sardis church could not have been in fellowship at all with those unrepentant sinful brethren. For us to be worthy to wear “white robes” we too 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 the eternal consequences of the same. —**David P. Brown, Editor**



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January 14, 2015

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Dear brother Jones:

I send this letter with a prayer that you and your family are well, and also with a prayer that this letter will be received in the spirit in which it is written.

I have studied over the outline of your lecture delivered at Freed-Hardeman University back in February of 2014, entitled: “How Does the Holy Spirit Convict Today?” [<http://jonathanjones2.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/How-Does-the-Holy-Spirit-Convict-Today-Speaking-Notes.pdf>].

In your lecture, you taught that the Holy Spirit operates directly upon the alien sinner and upon the Christian, as you stated in the “Aim of this Lecture” the following:

Paul indicates that the Holy Spirit himself convicts the hearts of unbelievers in conjunction with but in addition to the words spoken. But exactly what does he do? Also, does the Holy Spirit convict the hearts of those who are already Christians in some way?

This will prove to be the tone and tenor of your entire message, to prove that the words of the Bible alone are insufficient to convict the hearts of either believers or unbelievers.

You taught that one major reason for the “confusion” over the “work of the Holy Spirit in conversion” is that “many have failed to recognize a distinction between two stages of conversion.” No doubt, the reason for this failure to recognize these “two stages of conversion” is that the Bible says nothing of “two stages of conversion.”

You stated: “The first stage is the conviction of unbelievers

with a decision to believe and repent. The second stage is the subsequent work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration in the heart of the new convert” (Cottrell 190). In further explaining this “second stage” you say:

Once a person is convicted by the Holy Spirit and instructed with the Word and has arrived at belief and repentance, the Holy Spirit subsequently moves the human heart to submit to his direct work of regeneration within the heart” (III. THREE STAGES OF THE SPIRIT’S WORK, B.)

This not only declares that something is needed in addition to the word of God, but it removes man’s free will in submitting to the gospel plan of salvation.

You also quoted from brother H. Leo Boles in his book on the Holy Spirit: “Let it be understood now that since the church was established there has never been a genuine case of conversion that was not begun, carried on, and consummated by the Holy Spirit” (195) [part I., A.] To insert his quote in the midst of your thesis, is to imply that his writings are in agreement with yours. I have brother Boles’ book on the Holy Spirit, and also his writings in the Gospel Advocate commentaries, and to my knowledge he never taught that the Holy Spirit convicts, sanctifies, and guides man in any way apart from the Word of God. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is involved in the conversion of souls to Christ, but this does not mean that He does so apart from the gospel. If you believe brother Boles agrees with your thesis, please provide the documentation for this by post or email.

[I am enclosing an article on the Holy Spirit by brother Guy N. Woods. Although brother Woods did not agree with brother Boles on the personal indwelling of the Spirit, both were faithful brethren and both agreed, as all faithful brethren do, that the Spirit only guides and impacts man through the Scriptures, and not directly or apart from the Scriptures.]

Your lecture implies that brethren in the Restoration Movement preached a “Reactionary Theology” when they rejected the direct operation of the Spirit upon the heart of man. In support of this position, you quote Jack Cottrell of the Independent Christian Church:

In my judgment, when we reject the possibility of any direct action of God in our lives today, we get dangerously close to a deistic view

of God which leaves us with a view of God that he is far removed from our world and all he has left us with is the Bible. To deny the immanent working of God in our world leaves us spiritually like a valley of dry bones [Part II., D. *Reactionary Theology*].

Then, you follow this up by saying: “Scripture warns us against the tendency to ‘profess godliness but deny its power’ (2 Timothy 3:5).” Are we merely professing godliness and denying its power, by rejecting the direct operation of the Spirit?

What spiritually “dry” and impotent people we must be, according to your article, to trust the Bible alone, to guide, sanctify, and lead us to heaven. Yet, Paul did state: “**And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified**” (Acts 20:32). I will take the words of Paul!

How pathetic we are to believe that we are sanctified by the Word of God, based on the words of Jesus, when He prayed: “**Sanctify them through their truth: thy word is truth**” (John 17:17)! How blind could we be to think that the Scriptures are all-sufficient and able to furnish us unto every good work! Although Paul did say:

**But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works** (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

Again, I will trust the words of Jesus and His apostles.

ARE WE TRULY MISGUIDED SOULS TO TRUST THAT THE SPIRIT IS WORKING IN OUR LIVES TODAY BY SIMPLY FOLLOWING HIS TEACHING: “**THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD**” (EPH. 6:17).

YOU ALSO STATE:

PRIMARILY, THE CONTEXT SEEMS TO BEAR OUT THAT THE MAIN WAY THIS CONVICTION WILL COME IS THROUGH THE PREACHING OF THE SPIRIT’S MESSAGE (JOHN 16:12-13)...BUT AGAIN, WE MUST REMEMBER THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT HIMSELF IS ‘WIELDING HIS SWORD.’ THE HOLY SPIRIT HIMSELF IS THE POWER BEHIND THE WORDS AND HE WORKS THROUGH THE WORD. BUT COULD THIS ‘CONVICTION’ ALSO INVOLVE THE HOLY SPIRIT’S WORK IN SOME WAY THAT IS APART FROM THE WORD AND MORE DIRECT?” [UNDER PART II., A.]

ARE WE BLIND TO TRUST THAT THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH CONVICTS THE WORLD THROUGH THE TRUTH, WHICH HE BROUGHT TO THE WORLD THROUGH THE APOSTLES?

JESUS PLAINLY DECLARES THIS:

**NEVERTHELESS I TELL YOU THE TRUTH: IT IS EXPEDIENT FOR YOU THAT I GO AWAY; FOR IF I GO NOT AWAY, THE COMFORTER WILL NOT COME UNTO YOU; BUT IF I GO, I WILL SEND HIM UNTO YOU. 8 AND HE, WHEN HE IS COME, WILL CONVICT THE WORLD IN RESPECT OF SIN, AND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND OF JUDGMENT: 9 OF SIN, BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE NOT ON ME; 10 OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, BECAUSE I GO TO THE FATHER, AND YE BEHOLD ME NO MORE; 11 OF JUDGMENT, BECAUSE THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD HATH BEEN JUDGED. 12 I HAVE YET MANY THINGS TO SAY UNTO YOU, BUT YE CANNOT BEAR THEM NOW. 13 HOWBEIT WHEN HE, THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, IS COME, HE SHALL GUIDE YOU INTO ALL THE TRUTH: FOR HE SHALL NOT SPEAK FROM HIMSELF; BUT WHAT THINGS SOEVER HE SHALL HEAR, THESE SHALL HE SPEAK: AND HE SHALL DECLARE UNTO YOU THE THINGS THAT ARE TO COME** (JOHN 16:7-13; *ASV*).

How pitiful we are, who labor about the business of restoring New Testament Christianity, if we are only preaching a “reactionary theology,” because we hold that man is transformed by the gospel of Christ! Yet, the Bible states: “**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek**” (Rom. 1:16).

You stated: “The power of God in the Holy Spirit works beyond mere human words to bring about faith” [part I., A.] Obviously, you do not believe that the Scriptures are all-sufficient!

All along we thought that the Words of the Bible are the Words of the Holy Ghost [1 Cor. 2:13], and that they are able to bring man to faith, based on Romans 10:17: “**So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**” How misguided could we have been? If we are misled in believing that souls are purified when they obey the truth, who misguided us? After all, it was Peter who said: “**Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:**” (Pet. 1:22; cf. Acts 22:16; John 3:5).

YOU, WITH THE HELP OF JACK COTTRELL, HAVE INFORMED THE LORD’S CHURCH THAT WITHOUT THE DIRECT IMPACT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WE ARE SPIRITUALLY LIKE “THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES” AND ON THE BRINK OF DEISM! I WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO READ LESS OF COTTRELL AND MORE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL AND OTHER INSPIRED MEN OF THE BOOK!

ARE WE MISGUIDED FOR TRUSTING IN JESUS, WHOSE WORDS ARE LIFE-GIVING? HE SAID: “... **THE**

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**WORDS THAT I SPEAK UNTO YOU, THEY ARE SPIRIT, AND THEY ARE LIFE” (JOHN 6:63B; CF. MAT. 4:4)? INDEED, THE WORD OF GOD HAS THE POWER TO TRANSFORM AND CONVICT:**

**FOR THE WORD OF GOD IS QUICK, AND POWERFUL, AND SHARPER THAN ANY TWOEDGED SWORD, PIERCING EVEN TO THE DIVIDING ASUNDER OF SOUL AND SPIRIT, AND OF THE JOINTS AND MARROW, AND IS A DISCERNER OF THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTS OF THE HEART” (HEB. 4:12)?**

MAY WE NOT CONCLUDE THAT THOSE WHO DOUBT THE POWER OF THE WORD THAT THE SPIRIT GAVE ARE DOUBTING THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT HIMSELF? AFTER ALL, THE SPIRIT IS THE ONE WHO TAUGHT THESE WORDS TO INSPIRED MEN: **“WHICH THINGS ALSO WE SPEAK, NOT IN WORDS WHICH MAN’S WISDOM TEACHETH, BUT WHICH THE SPIRIT TEACHETH; COMBINING SPIRITUAL THINGS WITH SPIRITUAL WORDS” (1 COR. 2:13; ASV).** TRULY, WE MUST REST OUR SOULS ON THE POWER OF GOD’S WORD TO SAVE, CONVICT, AND SANCTIFY! THE WORD OF GOD, WHICH THE SPIRIT BROUGHT DOWN FROM HEAVEN (CF. 1 PET. 1:12; 2 PET. 1:20-21; 1 COR. 2:13), IS ALL-SUFFICIENT, AND WILL GUIDE ALL SOULS TO HEAVEN, WHO FAITHFULLY OBEY IT. ALL WHO DO SO WILL BE LIKE CHRIST AND WELL-PLEASING TO GOD (CF. HEB. 5:9; MAT. 7:21). **“THY WORD**

**IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET, AND A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH” (PSA. 119:105).**

You said that: “Conversion does not occur simply through interaction with cold words on a page...” I can assure you that the Bible is more than “cold words on a page” and more than mere human words. Paul stated of the word of God:

**For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe (1 The. 2:13).**

Brother Jones, God’s power to save is the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16; cf. Jam. 1:21; 1 Cor. 15:1-2). And, yes, the words of the gospel are sufficient to save. I would remind you of the instructions of God to Cornelius through an angel: **“...Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:13b-14).**

I pray that you will study these matters earnestly and reconsider the position that you have taken.

Sincerely,

Danny Douglas



(Continued from page 1)

**if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is” (1 John 3:2).**

This partaking is the fulfillment of **“precious and exceeding great promises.”** The New Testament is liberally spiced with the word *promise*. Of its approximately seventy occurrences, only once does it refer to a statement or action of man (Acts 23:21). All of the others are in reference to God’s promises to men. Peter seems here to envision all of the sweet blessings God has promised through the ages to those who serve Him, all of which are subsumed in John’s observation: **“And this is the promise which he promised us, even the life eternal” (1 John 2:25).**

This partaking is fraught with the keen responsibility of diligent cultivation of those traits that will nourish the Divine element in us and also keep us free from a corrupt world. Each of the eight traits (the familiar “Christian graces”) (vss. 5–7), after the first one, is to be “supplied” out of its predecessor, rather than merely added to it. *Supply* is a word relating to an abundance rather than to a minimum. Our attitude toward these traits is spiritually pivotal. Their cultivation will bring:

1. Usefulness and fruitfulness in ever-increasing spiritual knowledge (vs. 8)
2. Assurance to our calling and election (vs. 10a)
3. Prevention from stumbling (vs. 10b)
4. Ultimately, an abundant entrance into the Lord’s eternal kingdom (vs. 11)

Neglect of these traits will bring spiritual myopia, allowing us to see only present and immediate things, causing spiritual amnesia whereby we forget even our redemption from sin (vs.

9). Such neglect destroys our fellowship in God’s nature and condemns us eternally if persisted in.

#### APPLICATION OF THE TEXT

Having briefly expounded this context, let us now consider its relationship to the great theme of fellowship.

#### *Definition and Frequency of the Word, Fellowship<sup>4</sup>*

Partakers in 1 Peter 1:4 is very closely related to the word fellowship, which is found fifteen times in the *King James Version* and seventeen times in the *American Standard Version*. It is most frequently translated from the Greek word *koinonia*, of which *koinonos* (“partakers,” 1 Pet. 1:4) is a cognate. Kittel says: “It expresses a two sided relation....emphasis may be on either the giving or the receiving. It thus means 1) ‘participation,’ 2) ‘impartation,’ 3) ‘fellowship.’”<sup>5</sup> Strong lists the following ideas conveyed by *koinonia*: partnership, participation, social intercourse, pecuniary benefaction, to communicate, communion, contribution, distribution, fellowship.<sup>6</sup> *Metochē*, a Greek synonym for *koinonia*, is translated “fellowship” once (*KJV*, 2 Cor. 6:14). Both *metochē* and *koinonia* are found in the passage just cited. Both the *KJV* and the *ASV* render *metochē* as “fellowship” and *koinonia* as “communion.” Thus, it is clear that fellowship involves two or more persons or organizations participating, sharing, having communion, or having things in common. Of the seventeen occurrences of fellowship in the *ASV*, one is from Luke, five are from John, and the remaining eleven are from Paul.

The subject of fellowship is also discussed in numerous passages that do not contain the word itself, but that nonethe-

less relate to the concept of fellowship. Kindred subjects are unity, withdrawal from and rejection of certain ones, “church discipline,” “reconciliation,” and others, as we will demonstrate in the development of this subject.

### ***Persons/Congregations and Circumstances Involved***

Fellowship in the New Testament involves relationships between mankind and Deity (“vertical”) and between fellow human beings (“horizontal”). Faithful children of God have fellowship with God the Father (1 John 1:3), with the Son of God (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:3), and with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14; Phi. 2:1). One way in which the Lord’s people may have fellowship with Christ is by undergoing suffering on His behalf (Phi. 3:10).

Faithful children of God also have fellowship with one another ***only because and if*** they first have fellowship with Deity. When men have the same father, they are brothers,<sup>7</sup> and when two or more people come to partake of the Divine nature, a fellowship is established between said participants. This fellowship is clearly conditional, as opposed to universal or capricious. As Peter indicates (2 Pet. 1:1–4), fellowship embraces those who have:

1. Obtained a like precious faith
2. Been granted all things that pertain unto life and godliness through spiritual knowledge
3. Been called
4. Been given precious and exceeding great promises
5. Escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust

It should be manifest even the simple-minded that the inclusive terms of this passage describe only a child of God, a Christian. This fellowship likewise obviously excludes those failing these qualifications, regardless of how pious they may look or the way they speak or act. The non-Christian does not partake of God’s nature; therefore, he has no fellowship with the saints, and the Christian can have no fellowship with him.

Even to suggest that the Lord’s church bodily, or that saints individually, have any degree of spiritual fellowship with the unregenerate world of either infidelity or denominationalism is a form of infidelity itself. If some argue that this confines fellowship too narrowly, they should remember that God Almighty has done the confining through His Word.

Many years ago, while I was waiting for a haircut, a Methodist preacher, already in the barber’s chair, asked me if we in the churches of Christ still believed we were the only ones going to Heaven. Before I could answer, my barber, a faithful brother, said, “He goes further than that; he doesn’t even believe all of his brethren will make it!” He spoke the truth. Not only do Christians not have any fellowship with non-Christians, even our fellowship with brethren is strictly conditional, as I will subsequently set forth. One can identify at least sixty-eight verses in the New Testament that relate directly to corrective discipline or to withdrawing and withholding fellowship from an impenitent brother. The brethren described in this large body of Scripture had/have clearly ceased to partake of the Divine nature and were/are no longer to be extended fellowship by the faithful.

Note the conditional statement of John in this regard: “But if we walk in the light as he [God] is in the light [i.e., if we are in fellowship with God], we have fellowship with one another” (1 John 1:7). Paul described the acceptance and endorsement extended to him and Barnabas by James, Peter, and John—men in fellowship with God—as giving to them “the right hands of fellowship” (Gal. 2:9). John wrote what he did to the brethren in his first letter that they might have fellowship with him, and that they may know the way by which they had “fellowship one with another” (1 John 1:3, 7). While some brethren have suggested that the Lord’s day contribution may be in view in Acts 2:42, I agree with Kittel that Luke’s use of *fellowship* here is likely a reference to the “brotherly concord” that characterized those early saints in Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup>

One or more congregations may have fellowship with one or more individuals who are doing the Lord’s work in some remote place. One way (certainly not the only way) in which this may be done is by financially supporting a preacher. Paul spoke of the Philippian Church’s “giving and receiving” involved in their support of him as having “fellowship” with him (Phi. 1:5; 4:15–16). Further, he understood that the fruit of his labors would accrue to their account to some degree because of their support of his work. Paul instructed the Galatian congregations to “communicate” (*koinoneito*, i.e., to associate themselves with “...in the way of aid and relief”)<sup>9</sup> unto their teachers (Gal. 6:6).

Moreover, one or more congregations may have fellowship with one or more other congregations in the Lord’s work. One way (but again, not the only way) in which a congregation may have fellowship with another congregation is in financial support. Thus, when the church in Philippi sent support to Paul while he worked with the church in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:8–9), it was not only having fellowship with Paul, but also with the Corinthian Church. Likewise, when the church in Antioch sent relief to the churches (through their respective elders) in Judea, Antioch was extending “fellowship” to them in a very concrete way (Acts 11:27–30).

### ***Attaining Fellowship***

Human fellowship with God has never been and is not now universal and automatic. It is has always been conditional and attainable only by complying with God’s conditions. Man was in fellowship with God in the beginning, but he forfeited that fellowship when he sinned and God cast him out of the Garden

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of Eden (Gen. 3:9–24).

Since then, with only the exception of the Son of God, men have sinned when they reached the “age of accountability”: **“For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God”** (Rom. 3:23). That is, all human beings who have lived have sinned (aorist tense, which looks back over the behavior of mankind through all human history) and all who now live also continue to sin (present tense, men now sin and continue to sin). The further implication is that this also describes the behavior of man until time is no more. Since God cannot abide sin in His presence, man could not be restored to fellowship with Him (reconciled) on his own because he could not attain to purity and sinlessness on his own. God has always required the offering of blood on the part of those who sought forgiveness of sins, which forgiveness is necessary if sinful men would attain fellowship with God (Heb. 9:22). Consummate and final forgiveness could not be attained through the offering of the blood of bulls and goats, whether under the patriarchal or the Mosaical systems (Heb. 10:4). God’s ultimate forgiveness of men required the ultimate sacrifice of the blood of a perfect man. None on earth could be found (Psa. 14:1; Rom. 3:10), so God, in His incomparable love for man, sent the Pre-existent Pre-incarnate Word to become incarnate as His Only Begotten Son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 1:30–35; John 1:1–2, 14; 3:16; Gal. 4:4–5). This sinless Son (Heb. 4:15), Jesus, the Christ, offered His own blood, not for His own sins, but for the sins of sinful men (Heb. 9:23–28; 10:10, 12, 14). By His unblemished, unspotted blood we are redeemed from sin (1 Pet. 1:18–19). He made those once far off near, “preached peace,” brought reconciliation to man with God in the one body, His church (Eph. 1:22–23), and made it possible for former strangers to God to be fellow-citizens of His household (2:13–19). He did all of this through the cross (i.e., the shedding of His blood) (vs. 16).

Having paid the price which would enable man once more to attain fellowship with God, the Christ had every right to stipulate conditions on which fellowship could be attained. He did so in the Gospel, the message of good news, which declares: (1) that men can now be reconciled to God and once more enjoy His fellowship and (2) upon what conditions men can attain that blissful fellowship. Thus, the Gospel **“...is the power of God unto salvation...”** (Rom. 1:16). Reformers of the sixteenth century such as John Calvin and Martin Luther, reacting to damnable Roman Catholic dogma, foisted an equally horrible aberration of God’s glorious plan for man’s redemption upon the world. Curiously, they advocated that God’s grace is unconditional and at the same time that man is saved solely by his faith (obviously, faith is a condition). Of course, if grace (thus fellowship with God) were unconditional, not even faith would be necessary, and unbelievers would be saved. Salvation would therefore be universal because God desires all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; Tit. 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9). This heresy would stand exposed were there only one *salvation* passage in the Gospel, but there are many (Mark 16:16; Luke 13:3, 5; John 3:5; 8:24; Acts 2:38; 17:30; 22:16; Heb. 5:9; et al.). It is a shame beyond description that some who were once faithful saints and strong for the Truth, including elders and deacons, have now taken up this perverse doctrine. Calvin, rather than the Christ, is the source of

Rubel Shelly’s infamous statement on this subject: “It is a scandalous and outrageous lie to teach that salvation arises from human activity. We do not contribute one whit to our salvation.”<sup>10</sup> Numerous others who were once in fellowship with God have also echoed such “grace only” sentiments.

Most certainly then, fellowship with God is conditional, and those conditions are set forth simply and understandably in the New Testament. Summarized, those conditions are as follows. Men must:

1. Hear the saving Gospel (Rom. 10:14b) and believe it (Mark 16:15–16)
2. Believe in the Christ of the Gospel (John 8:24; 20:30–31; Rom. 1:16)
3. Repent of their sins (Luke 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 17:30)
4. Orally confess before others the faith they have in their hearts that the Christ is the Son of God and their Lord (Mat. 16:16; Acts 8:37 [KJV]; Rom. 10:9–10; 1 Tim. 6:12)
5. Be baptized (immersed in water) for the purpose of receiving forgiveness of their sins through the blood of Christ (Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38, 41; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:20–21; et al.)

Upon obeying this grace-motivated (Tit. 2:11), mercy-filled (3:5), Heaven-sent (1 Pet. 1:12), blood-bought (2:18–19) plan of salvation, men are cleansed from their sins, not by works of their own righteousness, but by the perfect blood of Christ as they obey Him. Having their sins washed away in the blood of Christ in the act of baptism (Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5), God the Father can—and does—receive them into His fellowship and that of His Son and the Holy Spirit.

How does the church of the Lord relate to this grand plan and to man’s attainment of fellowship with God? Note that all who obey the Lord’s plan of salvation and are thus saved (and no others) are added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47), the one Christ built (Mat. 16:18). Thus the church is composed of those (and no others) who have come into fellowship with the Godhead by having obeyed Christ’s plan of salvation, being thereby cleansed by His blood. Of Christians (and no others) Paul wrote that “...the Father... delivered us out the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the

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Son of his love (Col. 1:12–13). *Kingdom* is another term for the church (Mat. 16:18–19, 28; Heb. 12:23, 28). Only the kingdom (church) of Christ will be delivered safely up to the Father at the coming of Christ, implying its fellowship with God (1 Cor. 15:24). Christ will save only His church, His spiritual “body” (Eph. 5:23). The church of Christ is the household (family) of God (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15), another figure which indicates that it is in fellowship with Him. To summarize, only those who have obeyed the Gospel plan of salvation—and are thereby in the church/kingdom of Christ—have attained fellowship with God. The church (and only the church) is the “depository” of those who are saved and who have thus attained to fellowship with God (Acts 2:47).

### **Maintaining Fellowship**

Men who have once known the blessed fellowship of God and His Son may so behave as to forfeit it. Thus not only must men **attain** fellowship with God; they must so live as to **maintain** it. In the context of describing our fellowship with God as “walking in the light,” John wrote plainly: **“If we say that we have fellowship with him [God] and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth”** (1 John 1:6). Once more, John Calvin made an egregious error at this juncture. His doctrine of perseverance of the saints (i.e., “once in God’s fellowship, always in God’s fellowship”) has misled multiplied millions (if not billions) over the four centuries since his time and even now holds tens of millions in its thrall of false security. In Calvin’s system, once one has attained fellowship with God (i. e., salvation), he is irrevocably locked in; he can never believe, think, say, or do anything that will cause God to withdraw or cease it. As with the former heresy, so with this one, some of those who were once in fellowship with God have been infected by it and are teaching that God has an “umbrella of grace” whereby His children “automatically” remain in His grace. However, the New Testament specifies various sins that will cause a child of God to forfeit his fellowship with God and be lost eternally if not repented of (1 Cor. 6:9–11; Gal. 5:19–21; Eph. 5:5; et al.).

### **Withdrawing Fellowship**

The horizontal dimension of fellowship (fellowship between men) is determined by and dependent upon the vertical (fellowship between man and God). As set out above, only when (and not until) men become children of God, do they then (and only then) attain fellowship with other children of God. It follows that, when a person ceases to be in fellowship with God (i.e., is **“fallen away from grace”** [Gal. 5:4]), those still in God’s fellowship cannot extend fellowship to such brethren. It therefore should come as no surprise that numerous passages command the Lord’s faithful people to cease having fellowship with certain of their brethren and for a variety of reasons:

1. Teaching false doctrine (Rom. 16:17–18; 1 Tim. 1:3; 19–20; 6:20–21; 2 John 9–11)
2. Causing ungodly division (note that not all division is ungodly) (Mat. 18:15–17; Rom. 16:17–18; Acts 20:29–31; Tit. 1:11–13; 3:10)
3. Committing various sins of immorality, ungodliness, disobedience, laziness, and rebellion (1 Cor. 5:1–9; 2 The. 3:6, 11, 14; Tit. 1:10)

The reason faithful brethren cannot have fellowship with brethren who are disorderly is the same reason the church cannot have fellowship with those outside the church: Due to their sinful lives, neither alien sinners nor impenitent saints are in fellowship with God. Scripture demands that the faithful withdraw from and cease their fellowship with impenitent “disorderly” brethren (Mat. 18:17; Rom. 16:17–18; 1 Cor. 5:4–11; Eph. 5:11; 2 The. 3:6, 14–15; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:5; Tit. 3:10–11; 2 John 9–11).

Three major purposes are stated for such withdrawal action:

1. To make the sinner so ashamed, if possible, that he will repent and be saved (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 The. 3:14; 1 Tim. 1:20)
2. To spare the church his evil influence (1 Cor. 5:6)
3. To prevent any appearance of endorsement of sin or error (2 John 11)

When these explicit instructions are compared with the current attitudes and actions among our brethren, a nauseous disappointment settles over those who love the purity of the truth and the kingdom.

### **Liberalism and Fellowship**

Because of negligence among many brethren at this most basic point, the false teacher and the sinner have been allowed to flourish over the past few decades, creating a fellowship crisis. Administrators of universities founded and supported by brethren have defended and shielded professors who have taught egregious error to several thousands of our young people. Many of those thus trained have eagerly embraced and proclaimed the rank error they were taught and have increasingly filled brotherhood pulpits over the past few decades. Rather than reproving and dismissing such pulpiteers, elderships/congregations have tolerated, encouraged, and supported them, creating a massive liberal malignancy in the body of Christ that has captured hundreds, if not thousands of congregations of spiritual Israel. A large percentage of members of the church are now represented by what one can accurately describe as the “*Christian Chronicle* element.” This monthly tabloid, owned and published by Oklahoma Christian University, has for several years given extensive and very favorable publicity to all things liberal among brethren (including individuals, schools, congregations, and brotherhood projects).

These folk, who still masquerade as God’s people (and while hypocritically keeping “Church of Christ” signs on their buildings), occupy the ironic and contradictory position of endorsing, preaching, and practicing the very doctrines and practices God has called us to fight. Such apostates are doing their utmost to forge a widespread union with the Independent Christian Church with no repentance on their part. This is in spite of the fact that, beginning more than a century ago, their efforts eventuated in a grievous division upon the church by forcing unauthorized innovations upon congregations. For faithful disciples, John’s description of the “anti-Christ” of his day well fits these liberals of our day:

**They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they**

went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us (1 John 2:19).

### *A “New Approach” to Fellowship*

A new crisis involving fellowship has now arisen among a host of brethren who have known, esteemed, and worked in close harmony with one another over many years—in some cases, over decades—all of whom once considered each other unquestionably doctrinally sound and faithful. These brethren for the most part had a history of staunchly standing together against the inroads of the blatant liberalism described earlier. They had for years quoted and correctly applied the several clarion passages concerning the limits of fellowship as they preached the Word (Rom. 16:17–18; 1 Cor. 5:1–13; Eph. 5:11; 1 John 1:6–7; 4:1; John 9–11; et al.). The crisis arose from the determination of certain ones of these brethren to support an institution that has admittedly produced much good material over many years. This institution suffered great damage in 2005 because of a scandal involving its long-time executive director, for which scandal he was dismissed.<sup>11</sup>

Events surrounding the clamor to preserve the above-referenced institution in the face of the scandal have exposed a fatal weakness in many of these “sound” brethren—a weakness concerning the practice of Scriptural fellowship. Those bent on supporting and maintaining said institution found themselves on the horns of an uncomfortable dilemma. The newly appointed executive director of said institution brought with him some heavy doctrinal and practical baggage. (Some of his doctrinal errors and practices have been well-known and fully documented for several years, while others have come to light more recently.)<sup>12</sup> Suddenly (and almost incredibly), those who felt compelled to lend their names to the effort to sustain the institution seemed to forget (at least in regard to the executive director of said institution) the many years some of them had faithfully preached on Biblical fellowship and the many New Testament passages on the subject in their memory banks.

While they have rightly opposed and refused all fellowship with the first-described liberal element over the years, in these recent events they have consciously abandoned that stance regarding this one brother and the institution he directs and represents. Rather than behaving toward and concerning him as the false teacher he is, they have been willing to embrace, defend, endorse, and continue to use the services of this brother, in spite of his errors. An error in doctrine or practice is usually not “lonely” for very long. As the one unclean spirit sought and attracted seven others to join him (Mat. 12:43–45), just so, an initial compromise or error soon attracts other compromises and errors to accompany it. Not long after the institution referenced above felt its support base threatened and brethren compromised Biblical fellowship to prevent the occurrence of such, another institution’s financial base was threatened. The director of this institution defused the threat by bowing to pressure from the threateners, which required further compromises by the director of said institution (and his associates) to do so.<sup>13</sup>

Rationality demanded that, if one held the erring brother accountable for his errors, one could not support the institution of which he is the head. Contrariwise, one could not support the

institution which he directs, without implicitly supporting him. Unfortunately, those who have been insistent on supporting the institution have not let rationality deter them. Many of us who have worked closely with so many of these brethren through the years have been “amazingly amazed” as they have irrationally “rationalized” endorsing, defending, and continuing to employ the talents of the brother in order to support and preserve his institution. They have simply chosen to disregard his history of error in doctrine and practice. So desperate have they been to defend this brother, they have issued a variety of absurd excuses for him and for their illicit fellowship with him, as the following list indicates:

1. “The brother has said that his involvement in the elder reaffirmation/reconfirmation procedure was a ‘mistake’ and he would not do it again” (he has since told some that he does not recall making this statement, oft-repeated by his defenders, and he has told more than one questioner, he “would do it [i.e., elder r/r] again”).
2. “We support the institution, but not its director or any errors of which he may be guilty” (this claim was so patently illogical and unscriptural [Eph. 1:22–23; 5:11; 2 John 9–11] that its makers soon saw its folly and abandoned it as indefensible).
3. “We have no objection to the elder reaffirmation/reconfirmation program as advocated and practiced by this brother” (all the while they continue to state vigorously and publicly that they have been in the past and at present are opposed to elder reaffirmation/re-confirmation).
4. “This brother has issued a statement denying he advocates error regarding elder reaffirmation/reconfirmation or the “intent doctrine” regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage” (his “statement” was actually little more than a defense of his erroneous positions and a not-so-thinly-veiled attack on those who have dared oppose his errors).<sup>14</sup>
5. “This brother denies that he believes the doctrines he is accused of believing. If you don’t believe him, just ask him” (the problem here is that he has said and written far too much to deny his belief in the errors he holds and remain credible).
6. “Why should we be concerned over things that happened sixteen years ago?” (as if the passing of time were a substitute for repentance).
7. “One cannot know the ‘context’ or ‘intent’ of this brother’s words by merely reading a transcript of some of his oral speeches or listening to a tape; one must talk with him personally to know his meaning” (if this claim is so, then how can we know anything about “context” or “intent” of inspired writers whom we can never personally question?).
8. “Unless one was actually in the assembly and heard this erring brother deliver his speeches that resulted in the erroneous practices concerning elder selection, one is in no position to question what was said or done” (how then did those who offer this excuse have the right to question such apostates as Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado, the Pope in Rome, et al.?).
9. “Those who accuse this brother of error are misrepresenting him, and he will set the record straight if they will just call him” (I have not heard or seen any misrepresenta-

tions, only *correct actual quotations* from this brother in his own words; the evidence is both clear and abundant of his teaching and practice, and besides, this brother has given an interesting variety of answers to various callers who asked identical questions).

10. “It [i.e., the elder reaffirmation/reconfirmation doctrine/practice] is not worth dividing the church over” (perhaps the most revealing of all attempts to excuse the elder reaffirmation/reconfirmation error and its principal proponent; I suppose this declaration is intended to signal the end of all controversy and discussion over this egregious doctrinal and practical heresy).

Item number 10 above is indeed a bold declaration, and it implies even more than it explicitly states. It implies that the doctrine and practice are false, but it makes the judgment that it is just not “false enough” to warrant serious concern—never mind that it strikes at the very heart of God’s plan for congregational polity for His church. According to God’s plan of “church organization,” *only* men who meet specific Scriptural qualifications are to serve as elders in His congregations (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Tit. 1:5–9). The practice of this error fundamentally alters the Lord’s pattern concerning elders no less than the second-century departure from God’s plan did, but it is “not worth dividing the church over.” That first step led over the next few centuries to full-blown Romanism with all of its ungodly papal and hierarchical structure.

This unauthorized procedure makes of the local congregation little more than a mere voting constituency that has the power to select or deselect men as elders on *more* than God’s Scriptural qualifications, but it is “not worth dividing the church over.” The brother who implemented this plan has, among other things, added a new qualification to those given by the Holy Spirit, namely that a man must be “perceived” as a “leader” or he is not fit to serve as an elder, even if he meets all of God’s qualifications, but this new qualification is “not worth dividing the church over.”<sup>15</sup>

A second implication of item number 10 above is the following: Those who continue to *oppose* the error relating to selection/deselection of elders and its foremost advocate among brethren are responsible for dividing the church. The supporters of this erring brother thereby employ one of the oldest “tricks in the book,” which all rebels against Truth and righteousness characteristically and eventually seem to follow: “When faced with deserved blame for your own sins, blame your critics for the very thing of which you yourself are guilty.” Wicked Ahab thus blamed God’s fiery, faithful prophet, Elijah, as “the troubler of Israel” (1 Kin. 18:17). Elijah rightly responded: “**I have not troubled Israel; but thou...**” (vs. 18). In like manner these brethren, strangely sympathizing with a false teacher and feigning blindness to his fatal errors, are accusing those who hold him, his errors, and his champions accountable of being “church dividers.” With Elijah, we rightly say: “**We have not troubled Israel; but thou.**”

These brethren have as much credibility in such a charge as Shelly, Lucado, Deaver, or any other false teacher has had in hurling church divider at their accurate accusers (among whom

these recent error-sympathizers belong)—*absolutely none*. The “progressives” of the nineteenth century “drove the wedge that split the log” by forcing the instrument and the missionary society upon a harmonious, united brotherhood. Just so, these new “progressives” in the church are “driving the splitting wedge” ever deeper by their dedicated endeavor to force this brother and his error upon a once harmonious, united brotherhood. Numerous individuals and some congregations have marked this erring brother and his errors by public exposure of same. However, the one case of “formal” fellowship withdrawal involving this brother and his doctrine was done by a congregation whose elders have defended him, and their withdrawal was *against* an eldership that dared expose his errors<sup>16</sup>

In an article dealing specifically with the aforementioned withdrawal, Gary Summers correctly observed the following:

The evidence against Dave Miller is plain and open to all. When the elders at Highland [Church of Christ] in Dalton [GA] withdrew fellowship from the Northside Church in Calhoun [GA], in effect they withdrew from all of us who stand with the Northside elders in opposing Dave Miller until he repents of and repudiates the errors he has committed. Likewise, all of those who stand with the Highland elders in their unscriptural withdrawal and in their endorsement of Dave Miller, have *implicitly withdrawn from the rest of us*. Many of us cannot recognize the withdrawal... against the Northside elders..., who are standing for the Truth.... And if the Highland elders, GBN, and all who support GBN and Dave Miller choose not to fellowship the rest of us, they will surely have to give an account for that decision before our Lord and Savior.<sup>17</sup>

This unauthorized and unjustified withdrawal undeniably created a demonstrable division in which every brother finds himself on one “side” or the other of the line the Highland Church, led by her elders, drew. One dare not overlook the fact that those who have transgressed Biblical fellowship were the perpetrators of this dividing line. Blissful fellowship has been broken, but by whom? The wonderful unity we once knew has been shattered, but by whom? The answers to these questions are found in the answer to another question: “Who have *changed* and *moved* from their long-held, Scriptural attitude and action toward error and its advocates?” Our fellowship and unity have been fractured by those brethren who have decided to take a broader view of fellowship in order to support their human institutions. If the church is divided, *they, not we*, are the dividers.

*By what right* did the aforementioned apologist for the brother in error and his false doctrine (see item number 10) decide which errors are “worth dividing the church over” and which ones are not “worth dividing the church over”? In what way (i.e., by what rule, standard, Scriptural statement or principle) did he determine which errors are not “worth dividing the church over”? Jesus’ enemies had no right to ask Him the following questions: “**By what authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority?**” (Mat. 21:23). However, since the originator (whoever he may have been) of item number 10 above is not the Lord Jesus, the foregoing questions are perfectly appropriate for him. His approach to the error



relating to elders raises the question of what his attitude would have been toward certain matters that occurred in the first century, had he lived then:

- Would he have decided that the error of Ananias and Sapphira was not “worth” their being struck dead, although the Lord thought it was (Acts 5:1–11)?
- Would he have judged that causing unnecessary division by teaching error was not “worth” warning the church to turn away from such ones, although Paul thus warned brethren (Rom. 16:17–18)?
- Would he have determined that Peter’s dissimulation at Antioch was not “worth” Paul’s public rebuke of Peter (Gal. 2:11–14)?
- Would he have pronounced that walking “disorderly” was not “worth” withdrawing fellowship over, as Paul commanded (2 The. 3:6)?
- Would he have ruled that the failure to abide in and teach the doctrine of Christ (i.e., doctrine authorized by, proceeding from, Christ) was not “worth” refusing to aid and abet a false teacher, as John indicated it was (2 John 9–11)?
- Would he have opined that “adding to” the Word of God was not “worth” dividing the church over, as John implied it was (Rev. 22:18)?

Some additional questions are also in order in response to the claim that the unauthorized elder selection/deselection program is “not worth dividing the church over”:

- Is support of any man-made institution, regardless of its perceived value in the past, “worth dividing the church over”?
- Is support of any man-made institution worth compromising on the subject of Biblical fellowship in order to maintain and sustain said institution?
- Is support of any man-made institution worth attempting to “explain away” doctrinal and/or practical error?
- Is support of any man-made institution worth ignoring the long history of error in a brother?

The brethren who support our erring brother and his institution formerly proved themselves brave and strong as defenders of the faith and as respecters of Biblical limitations concerning fellowship of error and its advocates. They did so with such men as Rubel Shelly and all of his Nashville cohorts, Max Lucado and his liberal sycophants and fellow-travelers, and more recently, Mac Deaver and the supporters of his Holy Spirit errors. However, those who once stood strong have in this case become so enamored and enthralled with a mere human institution that they have proved themselves cowardly and weak—respecters of persons rather than respecters of the limitations of Biblical fellowship—regarding its director’s errors.

These new “unity-in-diversity” practitioners should not be surprised if Mac Deaver accuses them of practicing “respect of persons.” After all, they strongly opposed Deaver’s doctrine and refused to fellowship him, but they have more recently “observed the passover” concerning the errors of this other brother.

I say “more recently” because before May 2005, when his “sacred cow” institution’s very existence was threatened by scandal, many of those now defending this brother and excusing his errors, were opposing him and his errors. On second thought, Deaver would likely not make this call, for, the brother who has been given the free pass refuses to deny that he agrees with Deaver’s direct-operation-of-the-Holy Spirit theology. (*Note:* If this erring brother now being defended agrees with Deaver, how does one reconcile the relentless exposure, opposition, and refutation regarding Deaver [which I agree is fully deserved] on the part of many, with their eager endorsement, support, and defense regarding this other brother? Is this not a glaring contradiction?)

### *The Devil Takes Short Steps*

Compromise in matters of religion can be such a deceptive and sneaky thing. Once one has taken the first step down this road, it is difficult to turn back or find its end. The devil always takes short, incremental steps in advancing his cause. No full-blown apostasy has ever occurred overnight or instantly. The initial decision these once stalwart brethren made to compromise on the issue of fellowship in order to preserve their treasured institution has already moved considerably beyond where they began. Many of these brethren now freely fellowship those whom they formerly refused, with good reason, to bid Godspeed. This new “unity” would be laudable if it were based upon needed changes that reflected adherence to the Truth, but alas, Truth is not its foundation.

A single common aspiration—*preservation of a human institution at whatever cost*—has drawn these brethren together and caused them to ignore errors they once counted grievous.<sup>18</sup> These brethren have adopted entirely new vistas of fellowship compared to what they had several months ago.<sup>19</sup> Their behavior in regard to fellowship and their ability to blind themselves to a brother deeply involved in error has been both breath-taking and staggering to those of us who thought we knew them well. What they have instigated is nothing less than a new “unity-in-diversity” movement. They have moved at a dizzying pace beyond that first step of compromise on fellowship. It is difficult to imagine where or how they will find a stopping place. Since they punched that first hole in the dam, the hole has rapidly become much larger. If they do not turn back soon, it will be too large to repair.

This new “unity-in-diversity” coalition has dusted off an old (and good) term and adopted it as its rallying point. That term is *balance*. *Balance* has now become a word as beautiful and sacred to them as the word *unity* is to the ultra-liberals who have left the Truth in ever larger numbers over the past four decades, as described earlier. As a very young preacher in the early 1960s, I vividly recall the cry that began to go up from some of the preachers a few years older than I. Many of these were men who had earned graduate degrees from denominational seminaries. They came home weary of sound doctrine and of criticisms from their denominational preacher-peers. Others, not of this educated-elite class, were also chafing under the restraints of sound doctrine. From among these restless brethren emerged the “The Man or the Plan” foolishness, alleging that preachers

in the Lord's church had for years over-emphasized the "plan" (i.e., doctrine) while neglecting the "Man" (i.e., the "person" of Jesus) in our preaching (an accusation as baseless as the liberal complaint that conservatives never preach on "grace").

These fellows complained that we had been too "dogmatic," "negative," "self righteous," and therefore unnecessarily "offensive" in our preaching. They perceived our approach over the years to be "unbalanced" (never mind that it was Biblical and that the church had grown enormously under such preaching in the two decades following World War II). They began calling for "balance" and a "positive" approach. Dale Carnegie's *How To Win Friends and Influence People* and Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* all but replaced the Bible as a textbook and sermon source for these men. Those who did not buy their "program" were identified by them as "radicals" and "extremists" (is this beginning to sound familiar?). In light of the history of our brethren over the past four decades, I greatly fear where these most recent fellowship compromises and this new-found emphasis on "balance" will take them—along with a large number of naive and uninformed brethren. The Lord's warning is by no means obsolete: **"Let them alone: they are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit"** (Mat. 15:14).

Surely, none will deny *in principle* the need for balance in preaching the Gospel and in living the Christian life, *as long as we allow the New Testament to determine the meaning of balance*. Accordingly, I cannot conceive of anyone who is not concerned with attempting to be "balanced" and with avoiding properly-defined "extremism." However, the new "unity-in-diversity" element apparently believes it alone has a patent on the term's definition. Those whom they have ostracized from their fellowship are automatically, by definition, "unbalanced." We have earned this appellation primarily because we refused to support an institution with a false teacher as its director (see Eph. 5:11). We are "unbalanced" because we dared to expose this brother and his errors instead of embracing him in his error (see Eph. 5:11). We became "unbalanced" when we had the audacity to refuse to "go along to get along" with those "balanced" brethren who support, endorse, defend, and fellowship this erring brother and his institution (see Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9–11).

These newly-defined, self-proclaimed "balanced" brethren have proved themselves capable of some very colorful vocabulary in describing those whom they perceive to be "unbalanced." The following terms are only some of the ones gleaned from some of their "balanced" articles over the past several months: self-proclaimed defenders of the faith, radicals, caustic, rude, arrogant, unkind, obnoxious, disagreeable, far right leaning, judgmental, censorious, self-righteous, unforgiving, fight pickers, slanderers, damaging, vicious, those who are seeking to crush others, are intent on making someone look stupid, are more dangerous than liberals, and are wholly obsessed with full-time heretic detection. Would it be out of order to ask if the hurlers of the epithets on the foregoing list are demonstrating "balance"? Does one show "balance" in strongly worded condemnations of brethren for engaging in strongly worded condemnations of brethren? Is one "balanced" who spews negative outcries against those whom they accuse of being "negative"?

Is it a mark of being "balanced" to use biting and devouring verbiage to assert that some brethren are biting and devouring others? Does balanced describe those who employ toxic terminology to describe what they perceive to be a small, toxic loyalty circle?<sup>20</sup>

So many listen to or read religious subject matter and judge it almost wholly by its "tone" or by whether it is "negative" or "positive" in its approach. These reactions reflect wholly subjective standards. One rule should primarily govern one's reaction to religious subject matter, whether delivered by the written or spoken word: Does this message represent the facts of the case and the Word of God as it applies to those facts? If it does, whatever may be the "tone" of the material or whether or not the reader/listener may "like" the perceived "attitude" of the writer/speaker, the truth is not altered thereby—truth is still truth. Any other approach to what one hears or reads is merely an emotional, rather than a rational, objective response.

Granted, some readers/listeners may be more inclined to hear a given message that is delivered in gentler rather than stronger terms, but as long as the Truth is delivered, the message is no less true, regardless of the terms in which it is packaged. I am distressed to see brethren almost nonchalantly rejecting factual, documented evidence relating to Gospel Truth and doctrinal error on such totally irrational bases as, "He's too mean-spirited," "I don't like his attitude," or "He is so negative." They seem to reason that, if they don't like the messenger or his manner of conveying the message, they are justified in rejecting the message in spite of the evidence of its truthfulness. They play out the ages-old drama of "shooting the messenger" because they despise the message. (Have not denominationalists, in their blind prejudice, followed this pattern of response to the Truth for generations?) Doubtless, because of just such irrational responses many of the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, elders, and doctors of the law rejected the Truth our Lord taught. They turned away, offended by the His mean-spirited tone and the negative attitude conveyed by His harsh and heavy-handed words (Mat. 15:1–9, 12–14). They not only turned away offended; they turned away lost.

## CONCLUSION

For sake of emphasis, let us review: True unity and fellowship with one's brethren have always been conditional. Before men can be spiritually united with each other they must all come into fellowship with God and remain in fellowship with Him. John wrote: **"But if we walk in the light, as he [God] is in the light, we have fellowship one with another..."** (1 John 1:7). This oneness/fellowship is so precious that we are to strive diligently to maintain it (Eph. 4:3). There are few things more delightful on earth than genuine unity and harmony among brethren: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psa. 133:1). Because genuine unity and fellowship are so sweet, precious, and pleasant, faithful brethren find the pain almost excruciating when the blessed peace is broken. This prized unity and fellowship, which so many brethren at one time and for so long enjoyed, have been shattered. The cause is clear: Certain brethren have made a conscious choice to compromise the Truth, and others of us refuse

to do so, whatever the cost.

Those of us who are elders, preachers, and teachers of God's Word must preach and teach on this theme with renewed frequency and zeal to meet the crisis of both the present and the future. The recent actions of various influential "conservative" brethren is dangerously blurring (whether intentionally or unintentionally) the line of fellowship the inspired men drew for all time. This "balanced" new direction, if persisted in, will result in a new apostasy as surely as this same "balanced" new direction that arose four decades ago did. God's line of fellowship is a *dividing* line, as well as a *uniting* line. Just as it divides those who are in the kingdom of light from those who are still under the power of darkness, so surely does it divide those who are determined to abide in the Truth from those who are willing to ignore and excuse error. If the battle among brethren is lost at the point of fellowship, it is lost utterly in regard to keeping the church pure.

#### ENDNOTES

1. This chapter is an expansion of a chapter written by the author and published in *The Church and Fellowship—Freed-Hardeman College 1974 Lectures*, ed. William Woodson (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman college, 1974).
2. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
3. Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, NY: American Book Co., 1889), p. 661.
4. Some of the material in this section originally appeared in *Heaven's Imperative or Man's Innovations: Shall We Restructure the Church of Christ?* ed. Curtis A. Cates (Memphis, TN: Memphis School of Preaching, 1995).
5. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1965), 3:798.
6. James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1979), p. 43 (Greek Dictionary at end of Concordance).
7. This Scriptural Truth should not be confused with Max Lucado's heretical dictum that anyone who calls God his "Father" is his brother. Millions who call God "Father" have completely ignored and/or rejected the only way God's Word instructs men whereby they may become His children.
8. Kittel, 3:809.
9. *The Analytical Greek Lexicon* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers Pub., n. d.), p. 235.
10. Rubel Shelly, "ARBEIT MACHT FREI!" in *Love Lines* (Nashville, TN: Woodmont Hills Church of Christ, Oct. 31, 1990).
11. The institution is Apologetics Press in Montgomery, AL, whose founding Executive Director, brother Bert Thompson, was dismissed in May 2005.
12. Brother Dave Miller was appointed Executive Director of AP following the dismissal of Thompson. Miller advocated and helped execute an elder reaffirmation/reconfirmation program at the Brown Trail Church of Christ, Bedford, TX, in 1990, where he was one of the preachers at the time. I initially expressed my objections to this procedure in a letter dated May 23, 1990. This letter was written to brother Goebel Music in response to his letter, which outlined the program and expressed his reservations about it. He was attending the Brown Trail Congregation at the time. By assignment of brother Michael Hatcher, Director of the Bellview Lectures, Pensacola, FL, I fully documented this procedure and exposed its errors in the 1997 Bellview Lectures on "Leadership." Miller was complicit in a repeat of this procedure at

Brown Trail in 2002, shortly before he moved to Montgomery, AL, to work with Apologetics Press. (Upon announcement that he would be joining Apologetics Press, Thompson, Executive Director of AP at the time, who hired him, received warnings about brother Miller's false positions from numerous sources. AP suffered considerable financial loss from congregations and individuals because of Miller's hiring and Thompson's resistance [angry at times] to criticism of Miller.) This second program was documented in *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*, Oct. 2002, by Marvin Weir. Somewhat before this, Miller had excused the divorce of a prospective student, allowing him to enroll in Brown Trail Preacher Training School, of which Miller was the Director. The excuse was that the student and his cousin (whom he married so that he might obtain U.S. residency) never intended to really be husband and wife, so there never was a real marriage (in spite of their signatures on the license application and the marriage certificate). Miller elevated this student to be his Assistant Director of BTPTS (see David Brown's article in *Contending for the Faith*, Aug. 2005, pp. 6–9). Furthermore, Miller has followed a compromising course regarding fellowship with false teachers and at least one apostate congregation since 1995 (see Holger Neubauer's article in *Living Oracles*, March 2001; "The Final Word," MS prepared by elders, Northside Church of Christ, Calhoun, GA, Dec. 2006). Miller refuses to answer questions regarding his views concerning the direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the Christian (Terry Hightower wrote him by e-mail on Feb. 17, 2006, asking his position on same, and never received a response. He wrote Miller the same letter a bit later and sent it by USPS, return receipt required. Miller signed for delivery, but never responded.)

13. My "Summation" of events relating to the scandal involving Apologetics Press and Thompson was circulated widely in June 2005 (without either my intention or permission). My document so enraged brother Frank Chesser (preacher, Panama St., Church of Christ, Montgomery, AL, where most of the AP staff were members) that he wrote a vicious letter to me and mailed it to hundreds of brethren. This letter stirred up some brethren who had a deep loyalty to AP, at least one of whom was a generous financial supporter of Memphis School of Preaching. At that time, I was Editor of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*, and brother Cates was both Director of MSOP and President of the Board of TGJ, Inc., owner of the paper. This generous MSOP contributor did not like my notes concerning AP, and he let brother Cates know it, threatening financial harm to MSOP unless he took action against me. Others also let Cates know they did not like the forthright approach in proclaiming and defending the Truth we had taken for over five years in the pages of *TGJ*. This group threatened to harm the paper if brother Cates allowed me to remain its Editor. Brother Cates proved himself more loyal to maintaining the human institutions of which he was the head than he did to me and my consistent emphasis in the paper over the five and one-half years of its existence, which emphasis he had constantly encouraged and praised. Accordingly, on July 19, 2005, in an all-day meeting of TGJ, Inc., Board, he persuaded the remainder of the board that an editorial change was required. On July 20, under intense pressure to do so, I resigned as Editor and brother Dave Watson resigned as Associate Editor of TGJ. It has since, under its new co-editors, pursued a "balanced" (by the board's definition) agenda. An additional note: On July 28, brother Michael Hatcher, TGJ, Inc., Board Secretary (and the Board's spokesman in the July 20 meeting and newly-appointed temporary Editor of *TGJ*), made the motion to the Board that I be reinstated as Editor of *TGJ*. When his motion was rejected (in strongly vituperative terms by brother Joseph Meador), Hatcher resigned from the Board on July 29. On August 11 he issued a public apology to Dave Watson and me, saying in part: It now appears to me that there has been a concerted effort to destroy the reputation of a good man—Dub McClish. I apologize for my part in being used

to further their cause. I am sorry for not doing some of the things that I should have done and not realizing what was taking place (especially behind the scenes) so I would not have had a part in it. Brother McClish had done nothing worthy of being forced to resign, but it appears to me that the board bowed to pressure to get rid of him, and I was made an unknowing accomplice [sic] in this. This pressure began with Frank Chesser's hate-filled response to brother McClish's summation of the Apologetics Press Scandal (which none of the board members thought there was any sin involved). But apparently, to support Apologetics Press, brother McClish was sacrificed as was *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL* itself. I sincerely apologize to Dub McClish, David Watson, and the brotherhood for my part in this sad state of affairs.

14. See Miller's statement and my response in *Defender*, October 2005; see Dave Watson's response to Miller's statement in *Contending for the Faith*, Nov.-Dec. 2005.

15. Dave Miller, sermon at Brown Trail Church of Christ, April 8, 1990, in which he explained the elder r/r procedure the church would follow (see David Watson's article referenced above).

16. The Highland Church of Christ, Dalton, GA, withdrew fellowship from only the elders of the Northside Church of Christ, Calhoun, GA, on October 30, 2005. This withdrawal action specifically excluded the preacher and remainder of the church, which action is as unscriptural as it is ridiculous. The Northside elders expressed concern to the Highland elders because of their endorsement of Apologetics Press and Dave Miller. The causes for this concern were the close geographical proximity of Highland to Northside and that Highland was soliciting funds for its huge Gospel Broadcasting Network, which planned to use speakers from Apologetics Press, including Miller, in its programming. Full details of the events leading up to this withdrawal and Northside's response to it are available from the Northside elders: Elders,

Northside Church of Christ, 700 Jolly Rd., NW, Calhoun, GA 30701 or from Ron Hall (one of the Northside elders) at ronhalloffice@bell-south.net.

17. Gary W. Summers, *Contending for the Faith*, April 2006, pp. 16-18.

18. The aim of those who oppose brother Miller and Apologetics Press has never been simply to oppose and/or destroy this institution per se. Rather, our aim has been (and is) to abide by New Testament doctrine regarding fellowship whatever the cost, including allowing any human institution that interferes with this aim to perish, if necessary.

19. A case in point is the following: The retiring Director of Memphis School of Preaching, brother Curtis A. Cates, has not been secretive about his deep suspicions of and lack of respect for Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver over a rather long period of time, a view with which many of us have concurred and still concur. Consequently, none of the MSOP faculty would have anything to do with the Denver school for years until 2006, when rather abruptly, an MSOP faculty member became part of the BVBID adjunct faculty. Further, the 2007 MSOP Lectureship roster includes brethren Denny Petrillo, Director of BVBID, and Neal Pollard, preacher for the Bear Valley Church of Christ, home of said school. I am unaware of any recent basic change of direction at BVBID, but the once-objectionable things to those at MSOP seem objectionable no more. One other thing: The Bear Valley Church carried out its own elder reevaluation/reconfirmation program in recent years.

Another case in point is that MSOP's attitude toward East Tennessee School of Preaching has been negative for many years, and again, with good reason, many have believed. It has had a history over several years of inviting seriously questionable speakers (e.g., "Nashville Jubilee" speakers, et al.). Brother Cates has privately even been critical of his dear friend, brother Robert Taylor, for speaking on that lectureship annually. Now, however, brother Bobby Liddell,

recently named the new Director of MSOP, is scheduled to speak on the 2007 ETSOP Lectureship, in spite of the fact that the reputation for doctrinal soundness of this school has declined rather than improved in recent years.

Yet another case in point is that brother Cates, in a conversation with me in February 2005, was very critical of GBN and even of the elders of the Forest Hill Congregation, Memphis, TN (his home congregation and home of MSOP), for spending so much money on equipment in preparation for broadcasting over GBN. He told me they would not be permitted to make an appeal for money at the 2005 lectureship. He applauded my letter to brother Barry Gilreath, Sr., Executive Director of GBN (and an elder of the Highland Church, Dalton, GA), in which I related why we could not publish a full-page ad in the March 2005 edition of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*, of which I was Editor at the time. A principal reason for rejecting the ad was GBN's plan to use Apologetics Press staffers (among whom was Dave Miller) in its programming. Cates also expressed his lack of respect for brother Jim Dearman, Program Director for GBN, because of problems relating to him while he was a teacher at MSOP several years ago. Now, however, brother Cates seems to pretend that he never spoke such words or entertained such attitudes as MSOP and Forest Hill have obviously fully embraced GBN. The common element in these three instances is relentless determination to support Apologetics Press and therefore Dave Miller. Many, many other such strange fellowship realignments have taken place since mid-2005. These involve, among others, Southwest School of Bible Studies (Austin, TX), Online Academy of Bible Studies (Dyersburg, TN), and Florida School of Preaching (Lakeland, FL). Among others, these also involve congregations that formerly hosted Scripturally sound lectureships, such as Schertz Church of Christ, Schertz, TX, Southside Church of Christ, Lubbock, TX, Shenandoah Church of Christ, San Antonio, TX, and West Visalia Church of Christ, Visalia, CA. (Note: The foregoing list does not include such congregations as Getwell Church of Christ, Memphis, TN and East Hill Church of Christ, Pulaski, TN, which has employed the services of brother Miller in their programs for several years prior to 2005.) 20. See my article, "The Sudden and Curious Emphasis on 'Balance'," *Contending for the Faith* November-December 2005, pp. 23-27.

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*"History will prove that the majority of elders and churches of this generation looked around to see which way the majority of the church went—and then went that way without regard for the truth."—Guy N. Woods (CFTF, Vol. 4, No. 1, January, 1973) p. 4.*

*A lion is in the streets—and complacent elders and preachers keep saying, "Let sleeping dogs lie!"*



*"Will somebody please show us in the Bible where anyone EVER demonstrated patience with any wilful false teacher?"*

# DEVIATIONS FROM THE TRUTH

Roelf L. Ruffner

## AM I A RADICAL???

Recently I read an article by a brother-in-Christ who maintained that Christians were coming out of “liberalism” and “radicalism.” Now I know I am not a liberal (“loosing what God has not loosed”), but I do disagree with this brother on certain issues. He might even maintain that I was a radical (“one who takes an extreme position”). It is a sad day in spiritual Israel when one is called a “radical” for striving to stay with the Scriptures and having a “thus saith the Lord” for what Christians and the Lord’s church do in this world!

Am I a radical because I preach what the Bible says about refusing to fellowship false teachers? Fellowship is turning out to be of prime importance among the churches of Christ in the first decade of the 21st Century. Many Christians (including preachers) base their fellowship of others upon past “friendships” and associations. They invite “marked” (Rom. 16:17) false teachers to speak in Gospel Meetings, Seminars and Lectureships. Their excuse: “Well, he is my friend and he won’t teach anything like that here.” Brethren, “friends” can change, but the word of God does not change. They forget what the apostle John and the Holy Spirit decreed: **“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds”** (2 John 10-11).

Some of my preaching brethren have no qualms about appearing on the same speaking program with a false teacher and remaining quiet as a church mouse about this brother’s false teaching. Have they not wondered what the Lord would do if He suddenly returned and found them there? Would Paul have been on the same lectureship with the Judaizers of Acts 15? Would John have allowed himself to be on the same podium with a Nicolaitan (Rev. 2:5-6)?

A preacher should preach/teach what the Bible says about fellowship and false teachers. He should also practice what he preaches; always mindful of what the Lord sees and not what others think. **“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do”** (Heb. 4:13).

Am I a radical because I preach that compromise and toleration of false doctrine is a great evil in the church today? Compromise and toleration of false doctrine is a great evil in the world today as it has always been. Speaking specifically of greed but I believe the principle applies here as well, Jesus said, **“No man can serve two masters”** (Mat. 6:24). We cannot oppose a false doctrine such as Elder Re-evaluation/Reaffirmation, in which the office of elder becomes a political football, while holding hands with those who espouse it and practice it. Some brethren have this strange spiritual weakness called compromise which the Lord never had. For example, He did not hold hands with the Sadducees while opposing their materialistic doctrines. **“Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of**

**God?”** (Mat. 12:24).

The apostle Paul strongly opposed the Judaizers who tried to bring Gentile Christians under the yoke of the Law of Moses. Peter opposed them also (Acts 15:10), yet later compromised his position at Antioch by refusing to eat with Gentile brethren when certain of his Jewish brethren were present (Gal. 2:11-15). Peter wanted it both ways. And Paul “resisted him to the face, because he stood condemned” (vs. 11, *ASV*). The Christian also stands condemned before the Lord when they tolerate false doctrine/teachers in the name of so called “harmony” and “brotherly love.”

Lord willing, I plan to continue to preach and teach against false doctrine and to refuse fellowship to purveyors of it. Though at times it may be a lonely position, I believe that I am in good company.

## “PUT YOUR LITTLE FOOT”

Call me an ole curmudgeon, but I am sick and tired of hearing about the Robertson family of the popular T.V. reality show “Duck Dynasty” and how “Christian” they are. Yes, they say prayers over their meals, read the Scriptures out loud and denounce homosexuality. But most of the men wear long hair in violation of God’s word (1 Cor. 11:14). The family owns a winery (cf. Hab. 2:15; Gal. 5:19-21). They also are members of an apostate church (White’s Ferry Church of Christ of West Monroe, Louisiana) where two of the clan are elders. Members of the family are constantly fellowshipping denominations (Eph. 5:11) and even rank false teachers like neopentecostal Pat Robertson of the notorious “700 Club.” Not exactly worthy examples of the “churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16) for the world to see!

But one of the latest glaring examples of hypocrisy comes from Sadie Robertson, daughter, niece, and granddaughter. She twisted on to the television contest, *Dancing with the Stars*. I do not watch this show, but from its commercials it involves dancing and gyrating in various stages of nudity before a panel of judges. Sadie’s performance is no different, even though she loudly proclaims that she is doing it all “to the glory of God.” Her immodest costumes and indecent gyrating are no different than the other contestants who do not claim to be Christians.

Sadie and her family need to look up a few Scriptures in the Bible from which they quote so readily concerning modesty, lust and lasciviousness.

**In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works** (1 Tim. 2:9,10).

By what stretch of the imagination could Sadie’s costumes be called modest? I wonder if she could talk with others about modesty and godliness while wearing one.

Her costumes may well incite lust among her male viewers (Mat. 5:27, 28). And it may cause them to stumble and sin (Mat. 18:6, 7).

But the center of attention in this escapade is dancing. The modern dance with its many indecent movements is condemned in the New Testament as “lasciviousness” or “indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females” (*Thayer*, pp. 81-82). It was common among the pagan Gentiles in the 1st Century A.D. world. The apostle Paul condemns this sin in very strong language:

**Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these...lasciviousness...and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God** (Gal. 5:19-21).

I know that some of you reading this article may accuse me of “judging” (Mat. 7:1) this beautiful young woman and her family. But the word of God has judged these brethren already. **“Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment”** (John 7:24). They can all read the Bible themselves. Unless they repent of their sinful actions they will face the ultimate Judge—the Lord Jesus Christ. He will not be like some worldly judge in a dance contest. **“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day”** (John 12:48).

### A CRACK IN THE IDOL

For one hundred and eighty-four years the religious-cult-business empire known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) has held up their slain prophet-seer-revelator as almost a semi-divine figure. They speak lovingly of “Joseph” (Joseph Smith, Jr.) and his portraits always seem to have an angelic glow about them. For Mormons his life was akin to Jesus Christ’s in righteousness and sinlessness. Just as Moses received the 10 commandments on Mt. Sinai, on the Hill of Cumorah, Smith received, from an angel, the Golden Bible or plates of gold which he translated from “reformed Egyptian” into English and called the Book of Mormon. **“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed”** (Gal. 1:8).

What Smith did in the western part of New York all religious hucksters eventually do—established a church centered on oneself. Because of his heretical teachings and Smith’s financial shenanigans the Mormons were run out of New York, Ohio, and Missouri and finally settled in Nauvoo, Illinois in 1839. There Smith used his charismatic personality and zealous missionaries to draw the gullible from America and Europe to build a temple and a city with a population of 12,000 by the time of his lynching in 1844.

Charges of adultery and polygamy or “plural marriage” plagued Smith and his followers since the early 1830s. There were rumors and anti-Mormon newspaper articles reporting that Smith and his inner circle had multiple wives. These accusations were

vehemently denied by Smith. Yet in 1843, he secretly had a “revelation” from God (He claimed to have had several) that proclaimed “a new and everlasting covenant” or Celestial marriage in which a Mormon male could be “sealed for time and eternity” to more than one wife. It was kept secret until after his death in 1844 when Smith’s successor Brigham Young revealed it in the LDS’s new refuge in Utah territory. Polygamy was opened practiced by Mormons there until a manifesto by LDS President William Woodruff outlawed it in 1890 just in time for Utah to become a part of the United States of America. Since then this cult has excommunicated and turned in any polygamist members to the authorities. And they have denied that Smith was a polygamist; though historians claim he was “sealed” to upwards of 48 women in his life.

But “the times they are a changin’” and the LDS is a master chameleon. Many of its members are now internet savvy and can read what others say about Mormon history and especially the charlatan Smith. Polygamy is also gradually being accepted in American society as evidenced by the reality TV shows “Sister Wives” and “My Five Wives.” Recently an essay on the church website proclaimed that research has shown that Smith did after all have more than one wife, perhaps as many as forty. Some of those women “sealed” to Smith were for “eternity” as a “spiritual wife” and their marriage did not include sexual relations. The essay maintains that Smith and his legal wife Emma struggled mightily to accept his revelation. I venture they did!

If Smith lied to the world about plural marriage, what other things did he lie about? The tales Smith told about seeing and talking with God, Jesus, the angel Moroni, John the Baptist, and finding the golden plates and translating them must now also be suspect. Since the LDS church hierarchy has kept this skeleton in its closet for so long, what other things has it not revealed? Their idol known as Joseph is now cracked and Lord willing it will be shattered into many pieces in the days to come.

**For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage** (2 Peter 2:18,19).

### End Notes

*Doctrine and Covenants/Pearl of Great Price*, Salt Lake City, Utah: Corporation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1982; pp. 266-267.

<https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo?lang=eng> as of November 17, 2014.

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## WE MUST HONOR GOD’S LAW OF INCLUSION

Thomas B. Warren

A careful study of the scripture reveals that God has at least two laws relating to the general topic of fellowship: (1) the law of *inclusion*, and (2) the law of *exclusion*. In this article, I will be concerned throughout with these two laws—especially, with the latter.

The Bible teaches that God (through the Bible) *upholds* unity among His people (John 17:17-21) and *condemns* division (1 Cor. 1:10-13). But we must also be aware of the fact that God neither approves *all* unity (Rev. 2:14, 15, 20) nor condemns *all* division (2 The. 2:5-16; Rom. 16:17, 18; Rev. 2:2).

*God’s Law of Inclusion.*

1. *The law stated.* The Bible plainly teaches that we are

to recognize as God's children—and, thus, as people in fellowship with God—*only* those who have done what *the Bible* teaches is *necessary* to attain such a status (John 3:3-5; Gal. 3:26-27). Two men attain unto Christian fellowship with *one another* by each attaining fellowship with God (1 John 1:3). This is God's law of inclusion.

2. *When is fellowship with God and God's faithful people reached?* The Bible plainly teaches that one becomes a son of God (that is, reaches fellowship with God and with God's faithful people today) when, in obedience to Christ's instructions (set out in the New Testament), he is baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26, 27; Rom. 6:3-5). From these passages, it is clear that before one is baptized in obedience to Christ, he is not *in* Christ (where salvation is, 2 Tim. 2:10); he is not *a son of God* (and thus, is still *a child of the devil*); and has not put on Christ (thus, is still clothed with the "filthy rags" of his own sins).

3. *A Crucial question.* The question arises: Can we be faithful to God and not honor His law of inclusion? Can we, as Christians, be faithful to God while extending "the right hand of fellowship" to some who have *not* been baptized in accordance with Bible teaching? Quite obviously, Bible teaching indicates that these questions demand the negative answer. Christian fellowship cannot be extended, with God's approval, to those who have not been baptized for the obvious reason that one who has not been baptized into Christ is *not yet a Christian!* One who has not been baptized into Christ is *not* in the kingdom, *not* in the church, *not* in the *family of God* (John 3:3-5; Gal. 3:26, 27). Children of God do *not* have the right to extend familial privileges to those who are children of *the devil!* To

attempt to extend Christian fellowship to those who are still children of the devil is to *rebel against God!* In making such an attempt one actually is trying to unseat Christ as King! It is to dishonor God's law of inclusion which entails that only those are to be regarded as in the family of God who have obeyed Christ in being baptized. Such action is rebellion against God, and God will not tolerate rebellion (1 Sam 15:22, 23).

4. *A Warning.* Let every child of God be warned that there are some among us today who would have us reject: (1) the distinction between children of God and children of the devil, and (2) the distinction between the Lord's one true church and the denominations, all of which owe their origin and maintenance to nothing higher than mere human authority. Consider carefully such passages as Matthew 15:13; Romans 16:17, 18; 2 John 9-11. There are those among us who seek to bring "believers" in Christ into Christian fellowship, upon the basis of "unity in diversity" as misused by liberals rather than upon the basis of the plain teaching of the Word of God.

Let us remember that in spite of the fact that unity is an ideal toward which we should strive, it is still the case that we are to "**have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness**" (Eph. 5:11).

To recognize as children of God those who have not been baptized into Christ is to be unfaithful to God.

(*The Spiritual Sword*, T. B. Warren, Ed., "The Unity Which Christ Demands," July, 1981, pp. 18, 19).

—Deceased



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