

# ***The Twisted Scriptures***

W. Carl Ketcherside

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## ***Publisher's Note***

The text for this volume was produced by optically scanning the original book by the same title. We have re-set the type, corrected obvious typographical errors, and made minor formatting changes.

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— Bob D. Lewis, Managing Editor

## **Foreword**

A book with such an odd title as “The Twisted Scriptures” may need an explanation, for no faithful Christian, including the author of this book, believes that “Twisted” is one of the characteristics of the holy Scriptures. The author is referring to the way some people treat the Bible. They do not use it as much as they abuse it. The author likened the way some people wrest the Scriptures to a sign in front of a machine shop that read, “All manner of twisting and warping done here.” The author is saying that this is what too often happens to the Bible in pulpits and classrooms across the land.

That holy Scripture would be twisted and warped like a rod of iron in a smelting shop is bad enough, but when it is done to defend and perpetuate division among believers the evil is compounded. That is what this book is about. It lays bare not only “the horrid evil” that schism among Christians is, to quote an angry Thomas Campbell when he wrote of being “sick and tired” of partyism, but it exposes the sectarian spirit that seeks to enlist the Bible itself in support of dividing the Body of Christ over the opinions and doctrines of men.

This means that this book is really about hermeneutics or Biblical interpretation. Beginning in the late 1980’s there has been more concern among Churches of Christ/Christian Churches about the way the Bible has been interpreted. A call for “A New Hermeneutics” has made its way into some of the more seminal books, especially by our younger scholars, as well as in workshops, lectureships, and the papers. The material in this book, originally written in 1965, anticipated this concern by more than two decades in that it recognizes that many of our problems, including a fractured Restoration Movement, are related to the way we have interpreted (or misinterpreted) the Bible, particularly the New Testament.

This book, however, is not a call for a new hermeneutics as much as it is a plea for a reasonable and responsible handling of Scripture that goes back to the best minds of our heritage. It is evident that the author would not insist upon a new hermeneutics, but would settle for the “Rules of Interpretation” laid down by Alexander Campbell, which do not allow the Bible to be warped and twisted for the sake of either party politics or party doctrines.

Carl Ketcherside would not mind being called a “Campbellite” insofar as Biblical interpretation is concerned. One only needs to read Campbell’s seven rules to see that our people by and large have either been ignorant of such rules or have neglected them. They are the only hermeneutics we need, old or new. If we but heeded the wisdom of Campbell’s Rule 1 it would go far in “untwisting” some of our handiwork. It reads: “On opening any book in the sacred Scriptures, consider first the historical circumstances of the book. These are the order, the title, the author, the date, the place and the occasion of it.”

Campbell goes on in Rule 3 to lay down a hermeneutical principle that is as needed in our day as much as it was revolutionary in his: “The same laws of interpretation which are applied to the language of other books are to be applied to the language of the Bible.” That is, the way we interpret a letter from a friend is the way we should interpret one of Paul’s letters. Or the way we study European history is not all that different from the way we study Biblical history. Campbell was uneasy with subjective, mystical,

allegorical, and existential approaches to the Bible. In this study Ketcherside follows in the tradition of Alexander Campbell.

Campbell's Rule 7, which he called "indispensable," is especially evident in Ketcherside's approach to the Bible. Campbell was far in advance of his day when he formulated this incisive hermeneutical rule: "We must come within the understanding distance." He is saying that we must have the heart as well as the mind to understand. We must *want* to understand what the Bible says. If we are "within understanding distance" we will not manipulate Scripture to make it mean what we want it to mean. And we may have to distinguish between what it meant (then) and what it means (now). The heart and conscience must be arbiters as well as logic, rules, and principles.

This approach to Scripture is evident now and again in Ketcherside's writings, causing him to formulate what might be seen as new rules. These lines from his publication *Mission Messenger* (1965, p. 177) are an example:

These sacred scriptures, like any other communication between rational beings, are subject to interpretation and application by those who read them, and one criterion of accuracy in both areas is whether our view formulated by study is conducive to the reduction or increase of tensions among the disciples of Christ.

Notice how closely he follows Campbell's hermeneutics. The Bible is to be interpreted "like any other communication between rational beings." And how can one test his accuracy in interpretation? If said interpretation aggravates dissension between brethren and causes further division and does nothing to ease tensions, then it is suspect. That is because we are standing beyond understanding distance. We are not interpreting the Bible in a way that is consistent with the purposes of the Bible, which is to promote peace and brotherhood. If it satisfies the mind, it neglects the heart. Any interpretation that is in conflict with the Spirit of Christ must be rejected, however "logical" it may be otherwise.

This book is liberating in that it helps one to be a Christ-person rather than a party-person. It is rooted in the grace of God and the Spirit of Christ. It names sectarianism for what it is, a sin against God, and how shameful it is to use God's word to foster factionalism. It encourages one to turn away from the wooden and lifeless use of a few select proof-texts, which are themselves warped and twisted so as to fit some party line, to that view of the Scriptures that our Lord spoke of when he said, "They testify of me" (Jn. 5:39). This book shows us that there is a big difference between seeing our party in the Bible and seeing Jesus in the Bible.

Carl Ketcherside could finally write such a book as this only because he too was liberated from the party spirit. He was once a "wing commander," to use his term, of a little sect within the Restoration Movement. He was "on call" to debate those issues that were unique to his party. He had a narrow, sectarian view of unity and fellowship. The change came when he was alone one wintry night in a little Church of Christ building in Belfast, Ireland. Long weary of sectarian strife, he turned to the promise in Rev. 3:20, and for the first time in his life actually invited Jesus into his heart.

From that night on he embarked upon what he called his "Pilgrimage of Joy" which led him to become, as he put it, "a peacemaker instead of a piecemaker." He committed

the second half of his life to restoring peace, unity, and love between people long separated by the scourge of schism. Multiplied thousands whose lives he touched through his long years as an editor and lecturer are thankful for what happened that night in Belfast 40 years ago. As he himself put it, when Christ enters sectarianism has to leave.

Out of that experience he often summarized his plea with two affirmations. The first was that we have no right to make anything a condition of fellowship that God does not make a condition for being saved. The second was that wherever God has a child we have a brother or sister.

The following lines from the first chapter of this book are not only vintage Ketcherside, but they also reveal the spirit of the man. They also underscore what responsible hermeneutics is all about, new or old:

It is ridiculous to quote the scriptures to justify factionalism when they were given to forbid it. No honest opinion, no sincerely held doctrinal view, can ever be made the ground for rejection of one of God's children. It would be absurd for God to warn that the party spirit would debar from inheritance of the kingdom, and then make provision for the party spirit and enjoin it upon us.

— Leroy Garrett

## **PREFACE**

A number of years ago, during an extended period of labor in Belfast, North Ireland, I regularly visited some of the many bookstalls in the city which displayed used volumes. While almost casually browsing one day, I spied a book of which I had frequently heard but had never seen. It was titled *Union, or, The Divided Church Made One*. The author was John Harris, and the original purchaser had inscribed his name and the date of purchase on the flyleaf. The date was March 5, 1867. I purchased the book for a shilling, which was then valued at twelve cents in our coinage.

It was a rare find and I read the book through that night, underlining statements which impressed me with their truth and factuality. I have since read the volume twice more and it is now quite marked up. One quotation I wish to share with you is found on page 21, where the author is writing about the cross of Jesus.

His cross, like the ark in the wilderness, is the center around which his people are to encamp; so that they cannot separate into factions, or withdraw from each other, without retiring at the same time from the presence of the cross.

As you read my own book you will be constantly aware that this is the point I am trying to make. Our relationship with the Father of mercies is created and maintained through faith in Jesus as the Son of God. It was the cross which established beyond doubt how far God was willing to go to end alienation and pride and reconcile us unto Himself. And it is the cross which makes possible that marvelous sharing of eternal life which is called “the fellowship” in our English versions of the divine revelation.

Fellowship is not conditioned upon orthodoxy of opinion, uniformity in knowledge, or conformity in thought. The only unity possible to thinking men and women is unity in diversity. Conformity is possible only for robots or mechanical men, although slaves in their hopeless servility may approach unto it. Free men can be one only in Christ, and the deeper they go in their relationship to Him, the closer will be their relationship to one another.

To justify division in the family of God, which is never once sanctioned by the holy scriptures, those scriptures must be wrested, twisted and distorted. It has been my intention to honestly and humbly investigate some of the passages which have been cruelly misapplied and return them to their proper context where they will encourage us to produce “the peaceable fruits of righteousness” rather than the bitter and depressing harvest of heartache and sorrow which has been our lot for so long.

Much of what is said will be universally applicable to believers in Christ, regardless of the names on the signboards behind which they meet. But the perceptive reader will soon recognize that I have addressed my remarks primarily to conditions existing in a certain segment of a historical restoration attempt, listed in the United States Census Bureau of Religious Statistics under the denomination *Church of Christ*. The movement of which this is one of the branches was launched as “a project to unite the Christians in all of the sects.” That it is now the most divided movement on the con-temporary scene is not so much due to an abandonment of the scriptures as to the twisting of them to perpetuate “a System” which is confused with and substituted for the reconciling community purchased by the blood of Jesus.

— W. Carl Ketcherside

## Chapter 1

### **THE TWISTED SCRIPTURES**

*“The right to be wrong in matters of religious belief must be accorded, otherwise we produce hypocrites instead of persons with an enlightened belief that is fully their own. If the truth be might and God all-powerful, His children need not fear that disaster will follow freedom of thought.”* — Francois De Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambrai.

One of the most interesting letters in that treasure chest which is popularly referred to as the New Testament, is the one designated as 2 Peter. Written by the impetuous fisherman who was called from his occupation by Jesus, the letter is robust and challenging, filled with stirring thoughts and emphatic language. It is from this depository of revelation that I have chosen the statement which will form the theme of this little volume and provide its title.

Near the close of his communication the apostle urges his readers to exert every effort to be found at peace with God and to remain unblemished and above reproach in his sight. He reminds them that God’s patience exercised in our behalf will result in our salvation, and mentions that Paul also endorsed this thought when he wrote to the same people.

Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience with us is our salvation, as our beloved brother Paul wrote to you, out of the wisdom he had received, speaking of this matter as he does in all of his letters, some of which contain certain difficult and obscure statements, which those who are untaught and unstable, distort as they do the other scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15, 16).

There is no message, divine or human, which is proof against distortion by men who are ignorant or unscrupulous. But while such wresting of a communication given by men may not evoke consequences of a serious nature, destruction may result from misinterpreting or misapplying God’s revelation. In this volume I am going to concern myself with the use of scripture to divide and fragment the family of God, and to excuse and justify the very schism which the Word deplors and condemns. But first let us look at the rendering of our passage in two other versions.

As indeed our beloved brother Paul has written to you, out of the wisdom vouchsafed to him, speaking of this as he has done in all his letters — letters containing some knotty points, which ignorant and unsteady souls twist (as they do the rest of the scriptures) to their own destruction. (Moffatt)

Our beloved brother, Paul, from the wisdom that God gave him, also wrote to you about this. In his letter to you, as in all his letters, he speaks of these things. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, that is true, and there are people lacking knowledge and steadfastness who twist his words to their own destruction, just as they do the rest of the Scriptures. (*The Simplified New Testament* — Norlie).



The scriptures can be twisted, distorted and slanted. When this happens they may be used to undo the very purpose of God who gave them. When the written word is so wrested as to defeat the purpose, plan and prayer of the Living Word, something is indeed seriously wrong.

I do not think that we must infer from the statement of Peter that every person who wrests a scripture from its context is willfully ignorant or purposely unsteady. No doubt men can do this while innocent of any evil motive and with a firm persuasion that their application is the will of God. If they are ignorant, it is involuntary, and not deliberate. Such men, when shown a more excellent way, will at once amend their thinking. It is because of my firm conviction that the good and honest heart will receive the seed of the Word, and not reject it, that I address myself to those of my brethren who are shivering the kingdom of heaven into fragments under the delusion that by so doing they best serve the interests of our King.

### **Ignoring the Context**

Perhaps it would be well for us to contemplate some of the ways in which the scriptures may be twisted. Immediately, most of us will think of the practice of lifting a passage out of its context or setting, and interpreting it in isolation and detachment. This is always a malpractice, but it is even more grievous when the purpose is to justify or defend a presupposition or arbitrary position.

Our word “text” is from the Latin *textus*, to construct or weave. It is found in such words as textile and texture. It is related to technical, which was originally applied to the art or skill of constructing or weaving. Thus context refers to the discourse or writing produced by the weaving together of words in language, and specifically to “the part or parts of a written or spoken passage preceding or following a particular word or group of words, and so intimately associated with them as to throw light upon their meaning.”

The sacred scriptures occur in three contexts — time, place and revelation. If properly understood, they must be studied in the light of all of these. The word of God was not delivered neatly packaged and tied with a ribbon. It was the divine response to human situation. It did not create needs and then proceed to meet them, but circumstances existed and the will of heaven was revealed to relate to them. We are obligated to determine as nearly as we can the situation which gave rise to the revelation, and study it in the light of the circumstances.

As we prosecute our search for meaning it will become evident that strife and division have actually been promoted by ignoring the immediate purpose for which a thing was written. In anticipation, let me refer to 2 John 9, 10, where the aged apostle warned.

If any man come and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed, for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

Factional proponents have made the term “this doctrine” refer to every traditional teaching around which a party has rallied. We shall learn that John was writing to combat Gnosticism, one of the most dangerous philosophies to threaten the Way in all of its history. It was an attack upon the very foundation of the faith. To apply a statement designed to preserve and protect the faith against an invidious doctrine which

would cut the very heart out of it, to every minor divergent view and opinion, is as absurd as directing cobalt rays intended to check the spread of grave malignancy against every pimple or welt induced by a bee sting.

When we study Amos 3:3, where the King James Version has the prophet asking, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" we will see how failure to consider the immediate and remote context has trapped men into taking a position which would make all fellowship impossible and cooperation a futile gesture. It will also become apparent that any contention which must depend for its validity upon the rendering of a single and specific translation, and which is not sustained by other versions, must always be under suspicion.

### **Altering the Vocabulary**

Another way by which the scriptures can be twisted is by assigning an acquired meaning to a word and then proceeding as if this was the meaning accredited to it when used by the Spirit. In order to communicate the divine will to mankind in understandable fashion, God employed the method used by men in communicating with one another. And the highest form of such communication is through language.

This may appear in oral or written form. In spoken form language makes use of certain sounds, and to these, singularly or in combination, assigned and understandable values are attached, so that concepts or images may be transferred from one mind to another. In written form, certain characters are used for the various sounds and the eye serves to flash the message to the brain as the ear does in audible discourse.

Words are not ideas. At best they are symbols of ideas. Simple people require but few words and all of these originally have a confined or limited usage. But as those who use them develop new skills and multiply their relationships to the world around them their words take on new connotations. Words are like those who use them, they acquire new breadth and significance. The currency of thought is like the coin of the realm. It becomes polished through usage in the marketplace. Sometimes it is a difficult thing to determine the value of a coin which has passed through many hands. And the same thing holds true with words.

The revelation of God through the Spirit was given some two thousand years ago, in a land foreign to this and in a tongue alien to the one with which I am conversant. It was first announced by a voice and then written down. But since the time when the envoys of Christ lived and spoke, their words have been subjected to all of the changing fortunes of history. Too, they have been submitted to the shock of translation, in which the ideas they sought to convey have been fitted into new outer garments, some of which were borrowed and others tailored for the occasion.

The result is that many of the words we read in our translations of the scriptures no longer convey to the popular mind the ideas with which they were originally invested. It is not an exaggeration to say that almost every word in the English versions of the Bible has been hammered and pummeled by theological and ecclesiastical usage until it no longer communicates the will of God as at the beginning.

It is not our purpose here to deal at length with this phase of distortion, but a few examples may serve to illustrate the point I wish to make. Take, for instance, the word

“minister.” As used in the sacred scriptures it meant “servant” and any service rendered to the community of saints or its members was recognized as ministry. In our day the term has taken on a specialized and professional meaning, and a majority of the saints would disclaim that they were ministers. They use the word rather as a title to be bestowed upon a certain class of functionaries. This caused Alexander Campbell to write:

But in this appropriation of the title, *the ministers of Christ*, there is a variety of error, and of arrogance. The term *diakonos*, in Greek; *minister*, in Latin; and *servant*, in English, are expressive of the same character or standing, are titles of the same import. The term *minister*, a general or unappropriated title, designates any servant, and belongs to every obedient disciple of Jesus Christ. In the general sense of the term, it belongs to sister Phoebe, as well as to any apostle or bishop. And indeed, the widow who cast in her two mites, was a much greater minister or servant of God, than any of the Westminster clergy, who were servants of God and the long parliament. To call the clergy the ministers of Christ, is, therefore, a pious robbery of the obedient disciples of Christ, who are ministers of God as well as they, to speak in the most humble terms. (*The Christian Baptist*, 2, page 193).

Or, consider the word “sanctuary,” which comes from *sanctus*, holy, and is used to designate a holy place. Professed followers of Jesus often use it to label the place for the general gathering of the saints to engage in corporate expressions of praise, as opposed to Sunday School rooms, educational wings, or social halls. This demonstrates a kind of ignorance wholly unbecoming to those who aspire to be “a guide of the blind, and a light of them which are in darkness.”

Jesus came to do away with such distinctions, and with a concept of worship dependent upon being within a “sacred confine,” marked out by ceremony and dedicatory exercises. All such belonged to the adolescent age of Judaism, and had no place at all in the life of mature sons of God. In Christ there are no holy places, no holy days, and no holy things. There are only holy people. The Most High does not dwell in temples made by the hands of men. He is not worshiped with men’s hands as though he needed anything. The only sanctuary God has upon earth today is the consecrated heart of the follower of Jesus. This is the temple of God. It is the place where he dwells through the Spirit.

Now all of this is taken lightly by many in our day. Even in the seminaries where men seek to prepare themselves to instruct less enlightened followers in the will of God, it is tossed aside as of no particular consequence. It becomes a matter for levity and is made the butt of jokes. And the result is, that those who claim to teach the revealed will of God actually perpetuate the errors of the past and ignorantly pass them on to another generation to become a part of an unwarranted tradition, further obscuring the truth of heaven.

Although I feel very deeply about this matter, and am thoroughly convinced that we will never accomplish the will of God on earth until we recapture and restore the vocabulary of the Holy Spirit, I am going to allow another to say what I feel needs to be said. I am reluctant to present this lengthy quotation, for experience has taught me that we have

produced many superficial readers and shallow thinkers in our day. There is a tendency to skip over quotations as a dragonfly skims over a body of water, scarcely getting the gossamer wings wet. In this instance, however, I implore my readers to give consideration to every sentence of the following rather lengthy statement. I have chosen to share with you these words of Alexander Campbell because they express my sentiments far more forcibly than I could enunciate them in my own words.

There must be, and there shall be an abandonment of the new and corrupt nomenclature, and a restoration of the inspired one. In other words there must be an abandonment of the Babylonish or corrupt phraseology of the dark ages and of modern discoveries, in the fixed style of the Christian vocabulary. This is a matter of greater importance than may, at first sight, appear to all. Words and names long consecrated, and sanctified by long prescription, have a very imposing influence upon the human understanding. We think as well as speak by means of words. It is just as impossible for an adult to think as to speak without words. Let him that doubts make the experiment.

Now as all correct ideas of God and things invisible are supernatural ideas, no other terms can so suitably express them as the terms adopted by the Holy Spirit, in adapting those supernatural truths to our apprehension. He that taught man to speak, would doubtless adopt the most suitable terms in his language to reveal himself to his understanding. To disparage those terms, by adopting others in preference, is presumptuous and insolent on the part of man. Besides when men adopt terms to express supernatural truths, it is not the truths themselves, but their ideas of them they communicate. They select such terms as suit their apprehensions of revealed truth, and hence the terms they use are expressive only of their conceptions of divine things and must just be as imperfect as their conceptions are. It is impossible for any man, unless by accident, to express accurately that which he apprehends imperfectly.

From this source spring most of our *doctrinal* controversies. Men's opinions, expressed in their own terms, are often called Bible truths. In order then to a full restoration of the ancient order of things there must "a pure speech" restored. And I think the Lord once said, in order to a restoration, that he would restore to the people "a pure speech." We know that the ancient order of things amongst the Jews, could not be restored, after their captivity in Babylon, until the law of the Lord, containing the primitive institutions of the Jews' religion, was read and understood by the people, and the dialect of Babylon abandoned as far as it corrupted the primitive simplicity of that religion. Hence the scribes read them the law from morning to evening, gave them the sense and made them understand the reading. This became necessary because of the corrupt dialect they had learned in Babylon, on account of which their religion was unintelligible to them until the language of Canaan was purged from the phraseology of Ashdod. It will, we apprehend, be found precisely similar in the antitype, or in the return of the people of God from the captivity of Babylon the great, the mother of abominations" (*The Christian Baptist*, Volume 2, pages 222, 223).

## Disrespect for Authority

The problem with which we are dealing arises from lack of respect for the authority of the sacred scriptures. Nothing is clearer than the fact that we are enjoined by the written word to live in harmony with the brethren. From a positive standpoint we are commanded to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This command is not to be made the basis of cavilling or casuistry. It demands obedience and compliance.

Its requirement is reinforced by other passages which encourage togetherness among the saints and forbid them to divide or to engage in strife. "We who are strong ought to bear with the feelings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1). We are told to "welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God," and this is specifically said to be for the purpose of encouraging harmony with one another, accord with Christ Jesus, and glorification of God with one voice.

We are not to "set at nought" a brother, that is, pass judgment upon him, or declare him unworthy because of his opinions, scruples or rationalizations. Quarreling and jealousy are in a list of things which are said to be unbecoming (Romans 13:13), and anger, selfishness, dissension, and the party spirit, are works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20). Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Not one time is division in the family of God ever recommended as a means of resolving differences or doctrinal disagreements. Every time division of God's children is mentioned it is condemned. Division is the work of the unspiritual and not of those who are led by the Holy Spirit. Speaking of scoffers, Jude writes, "It is these who set up divisions, worldly people devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

It is ridiculous to quote the scriptures to justify factionalism when they were given to forbid it. No honest opinion, no sincerely held doctrinal view, can ever be made the ground for rejection of one of God's children. It would be absurd for God to warn that the party spirit would debar from inheritance of the kingdom, and then make provision for the party spirit and enjoin it upon us. Strife and division are the characteristics of those who are carnal and immature (1 Corinthians 3:1-4).

Unity in Christ is not conformity but community. We are one because we share a common faith, and not because we hold the same opinions. The only passage which declares there is one faith informs us that in our calling we must live "with patience, forbearing one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). Patience and forbearance are not qualities of robots, but of thinking men and women. God made us to differ mentally as we differ physically. We can no more all think alike than we can all look alike.

We are not in the fellowship because we see everything alike, or because we like everything we see. We are together because God has called us all, and received us all when we responded to his call. God did not call angels, but men! We are human before we are called and we are human after we are called. We are not changed into the perfect image at once, but "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Being human, there is only one type of unity possible for us, and that is unity in diversity. If we do not accept this form of unity there is no other for us. Fellowship results from a mutual sonship; brotherhood from a common Fatherhood. We are not one because we have all attained to the same degree of spiritual growth, but because we are all in the same family. We are not one in opinion, but one in Christ Jesus. To interpret the word of God to fragment those who are in the Son of God, and thus to justify their carnality and immaturity, is to do despite to the Spirit of grace.

The living Word was made flesh to bring us together in the Lord. His was the task of reconciliation and recovery. The written word is the account of how He accomplished this magnificent and divine purpose, and is provided so that we may know how to enter into it and become a part of it. It is cruel to turn the sword of the Spirit against those who have been born of the Spirit. It is insane to take the weapon given us to battle the forces of darkness and use it to spill the blood of the soldiers of light.

It will be our task in the chapters which lie ahead to show how a misunderstanding and misapplication of the written word has been the means of sowing discord among brethren. We shall seek to recover the spirit of God's revelation in the revelation of God's Spirit. The prayer of Jesus for the unity of the believers will be our watchword as we attempt to untwist the scriptures and place them in proper order and context. Ours will be an honest attempt to let the word of God speak for the God of the word!

## Chapter 2

### ***EXCEPT THEY BE AGREED***

Amos was the farmer who turned prophet at the insistence of God. He did not know when he did so that he would become the chief oracle of the traditional party of the “unity by conformity” advocates in the Christian Dispensation, almost three millennia after his death. It really was not his fault. The whole thing came about because of the semantic quirk of a group of translators appointed by a king who wanted a Bible he could authorize to be read in the pulpits of the Episcopal Church.

When the eminent linguists came upon a list of questions proposed by the prophet to account for his intrusion upon a rather hostile area, they unfortunately made him say, “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” The roving eyes of the text-seekers and sermonizers glimpsed this inadvertent question and it was thereupon made the basis for numerous dissertations intended to prove that no two people can walk together unless they are agreed.

Obviously, no two of the proponents of this peculiar and unworkable philosophy agree upon everything, so with the true, casuistic rationalization which is part and parcel of the party spirit, agreement was limited only to the opinions upon which the party was arbitrarily founded and which gave it grounds for perpetuity. We propose to examine this statement of Amos in full context and show how it has become one of the twisted scriptures.

Solomon was the last monarch of the twelve tribe kingdom in its undivided state. In the days of his son and successor, a revolt occurred because of the oppressive taxation required to maintain the opulent splendor of the regal family. Ten of the tribes seceded and set up the Kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam. He immediately introduced calf-worship at Dan and Bethel and plunged his domain into idolatry from which it never recovered. In 220 years nine different dynasties succeeded each other to the throne as a result of suicide, conspiracy and assassination.

If the reign of Jeroboam II in the fifth dynasty seemed an exception because of outward prosperity, it was deceptive. The undercurrent of degeneracy continued unchecked beneath the surface. Because of it God called a prophet to denounce the open and flagrant sins of the people. The man whom he selected was not a recognized prophet. He had not attended one of the schools of the prophets which had flourished since the days of Samuel to train young men in the prophetic role. He was a simple farmer living in the wilderness serenity surrounding the little village of Tekoah, six miles south of Bethlehem and twelve miles south of Jerusalem. His livelihood was derived from the rustic pursuits of herding cattle and caring for his orchard of sycamine figs.

Since he lived in Judah, the commission to go to the king’s court in Bethel, was a call to invade a hostile region. The message he was to deliver was calculated to make him even more unpopular. He was to denounce the corruption which was so prevalent, but he was also to foretell the captivity and exile of the people at the hands of a rapidly growing alien power. Amos went as God had instructed him and he lifted up his voice

against the immorality, injustice and intemperance which characterized the lives of the people, with such effectiveness that something had to be attempted to thwart his effort.

The local priest was Amaziah. He was a fawning sycophant on the payroll of the King. He began his attack by telling Jeroboam that Amos was a conspirator. He implied that he was an infiltrator who was collaborating with the Davidic regime in Judah, commissioned to come up north to create unrest and dissension. He then confronted Amos and ordered him off the royal property and out of the country, closing with the words, "Don't you ever again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom." He did not mention that the temple was dedicated to calf-worship!

The country preacher was not easily frightened. He pointed out that he was not a professional making his living out of the trade of prophesying and was not even a seminary graduate. He was actually following the flock at the very time the Lord said, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel." He then informed Amaziah that his sons and daughters would be slain, his wife would have to become a prostitute in the city to support herself, his real estate holdings would be parceled out to strangers, and he would become a captive and die in a foreign land.

Because of the fearlessness of Amos we think the first part of his prophecy deserves some attention, especially since the "scriptural scrap-doctors" as Alexander Campbell always referred to them, have abused one of his statements to make the prophet mean something that he never implied. The passage to which we allude is found in Amos 3:3 but we will start at the beginning of his book. Chapter 1 begins with a specification of the time when the prophecy was uttered. It was "two years before the earthquake," a tremor of such magnitude that the people in Jerusalem fled from it as they would the day of the Lord (Zechariah 14:5).

To begin with, it is important to note that the Lord is referred to as a lion whose den, or place of abode, is Jerusalem in Zion. This metaphor is not farfetched when you recall that to the ancients the lion was the very symbol of strength and power. And it is affirmed that the voice of God is so powerful, and his predictions are so certain of fulfillment, that the very pastures dry up and the dew-covered summit of Mount Hermon withers. The roar of God is expressed through his prophets.

It is apparent that when God roars as a lion it betokens his judgment upon the nations. The time has come that he will rend them as prey. So there follows in swift and regular succession pronouncements against Damascus, in Syria; Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron, in Philistia; Tyre, in Phoenicia; Edom, Ammon and Moab. After this list is completed, the prophet comes to the two kingdoms which have sprung from the seed of Abraham, Judah and Israel.

The utterances against these last two bring the prophet to the place where he addresses all of the tribes as a whole. They are more responsible than any other nation for two reasons. First, God personally formed them as a nation by delivering them from the womb of Egypt; secondly, he claimed them for his own out of all the nations of the whole earth. Now he speaks against them because the day has come when their iniquities and judgments have met. Throughout all denunciatory prophecy runs the



thread of certainty that God will bring to judgment every evil work. The divine appointment is that inevitably the sin and its punishment must meet.

Since this is the very nature of divine justice the prophet appeals to natural reactions to illustrate it. He exemplifies it by two people walking together because they had made a previous appointment to meet, a lion roaring because he has captured prey, young lions snarling in a den as they tear their food, a trap or snare springing shut because a victim has hit the trigger, or people in a city running for shelter when the official trumpet signals an alarm. His argument is simply one of cause and effect. He reasons that for every effect there is a cause and you may determine the cause by observation of the effect.

He concludes by pointing out that God does not visit his wrath upon a city without revealing his secret to the prophets. When the prophets speak it is the voice of God and the populace should react accordingly. The prophet cannot resist speaking the word of God; the hearers should not resist obeying it. "The lion has roared; who will not fear" The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy? With this introduction we are prepared to look at the prophetic message itself. Here it is as found in the King James Version.

Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing?

Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is set for him? shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all?

Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?

Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.

The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?

The art of sermon-making, a skill wholly unknown to the new covenant scriptures, has led its practitioners far afield in their ardent quest for texts. When one is found which seems no suit the propaganda purpose of the hour, they operate and remove it from the contextual body, and by copious injections of their own intellectual distillate seek to make it develop into a new body of its own. No creation of homiletic fantasy better illustrates this than the use of Amos 3:3 by modern advocates of unity based upon conformity. The proponents of the cult of the rubber stamp have seized upon this passage as the one stone which will grind their grist, and wherever they speak the sound of the millstone is heard in the land.

As any person of even the slightest scholarly bent can ascertain for himself, this is an absurd abuse of the prophetic intent. Not only was Amos not providing a text for a sermon on unity but the passage is not even remotely connected with the use made of it by solemn clerics who weave from this one little filmy thread a gossamer web to cover all of the saints in all of their association with each other.

Can two walk together unless they be agreed? Do two people have to agree upon everything in the world before they can walk together? If so, no two people on earth will walk together, or ever have done so. Shall we interpret God's word to forbid and make absolutely impossible the very unity which it repeatedly commands? But I am told that this does not mean they must agree upon everything. This surrenders the whole argument. Either two people must agree upon everything in order to walk together or else two people can walk together who are not agreed, and you will need to find a new text for the ridiculous doctrine based upon conformity.

The utter absurdity into which people are driven by forced exegesis to sustain a presupposition and partisan position was observed not long ago in the home of a certain preacher. He contended that two could not walk together unless they were agreed. His wife challenged his statement. She mentioned that she had never agreed with her parents on their attitude toward her brother but they still all continued to walk together as one family. She and her husband then got into an argument and could not even agree upon what it meant to be agreed, but the last I heard they were still walking together — and arguing as they walked.

### The Meaning of the Passage

But what did Amos mean? We will be helped in our understanding by consulting other versions. First, I shall refer to the translation by Robert Young, who was the author of various works in Hebrew, Chaldee, Samaritan, Syriac, Greek and Latin, and who is best known to most of us as author of an *Analytical Concordance*. Dr. Young was quite critical of the King James translators for laxity in translating and compiled a lengthy list which he designated "Lax Renderings," and which I have found most interesting. He translates Amos 3:3, "Do two walk together, if they have not met?"

Many of our readers will possess, or have access to a Revised Standard Version, and can easily ascertain that it renders the passage, "Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?" It will readily be seen that if these are correct, the use of the passage as descriptive of the nature of unity is forever barred to honest men who walk in integrity and do not "handle the word of God deceitfully."

The original word for "agreed" is *yaad*. This is a primitive Hebrew root which is defined by *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* thus, "To fix upon (by agreement or appointment) by implication to meet (at a stated time), to summon (to trial), to direct (in a certain quarter or position), to engage (for marriage).

The word translated "agreed" has not one thing to do with the attitude, purpose or nature of two people while walking together. The agreement is to meet and walk together, and is not related to walking together in agreement. The agreement or appointment precedes the walking together as the cause precedes the effect. The word *yaad* is not marriage, but engagement to marry. It is not occupying a position, but directing one to it. It is not a trial, but the summons issued to appear for trial. It is not the state of walking together, but a prior appointment to meet and walk. Men might make an agreement to meet and walk together to debate their differences.

The word occurs in the same form and tense 19 times in the Hebrew scriptures. It is translated "meet" nine times of which six (Exodus 25:22; 29:42, 43; 30:6,36; Numbers

17:4) refer to God's appointment to meet his people in the tabernacle. In Joshua 11:5 it relates to meeting together by appointment of a number of kings at the waters of Merom to fight against Israel. In Nehemiah 6:2,10, it refers to the attempt of Sanballat, Geshem and others, to meet with Nehemiah, to work mischief. The meeting never occurred.

Even more revealing is the usage of the word in Job 2:11, concerning Job's three friends who came every one from his own place, "for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him." The boldface words are the translation of *yaad*. Any student of the book of Job knows that these three men did not agree. They argued with each other, accused Job, and attempted to speak for God. When they had finished, a youthful companion who was standing by listening, became so angry at their replies he pitched into the debate and told them all off. The three friends of Job did not meet to agree, they simply agreed to meet.

The fact is that the only unity possible on this earth for *thinking* people is unity in diversity. Unity by conformity is a unity of puppets or automatons. It is the unity of those who surrender their right to think and reason. And it is not really unity at all, but a mere sublimation of one's faculties and rational powers and a bowing to tyranny or dictatorship.

In a very perceptive statement, Ralph Waldo Emerson labeled groups requiring conformity, as "communities of opinion":

Most men have bound their eyes with one or another handkerchief, and attached themselves to some one of these communities of opinion. This conformity makes them not false in a few particulars, authors of a few lies, but false in all particulars. A man must consider what a rich realm he abdicates when he becomes a conformist.

When Thomas Jefferson was defending the "Virginia Act for Religious Freedom," he said:

Subject opinion to coercion: whom will you make your inquisitors? Fallible men; men governed by bad passions, by private as well as public reasons. And why subject it to coercion? To produce uniformity. But is uniformity of opinion desirable? No more than of face and stature.

But it was Alexander Campbell in his chapter on "The Foundation of Christian Union" appearing in his volume called *Christianity Restored* who pointed out that conformity in opinion has been the real basis of all sectarianism. His statement deserves earnest study.

But men cannot give up their opinions, and, therefore, they can never unite, says one. We do not ask them to give up their opinions — we ask them only not to impose them upon others. Let them hold their opinions; but let them hold them as private property. The faith is public property; opinions are, and always have been, private property. Men have foolishly attempted to make the deductions of some great minds the common measure of all Christians. Hence the deductions of a Luther, and a Calvin, and a Wesley, have been the rule and measure of all who coalesce under the names of these leaders. It is cruel to excommunicate a man because of the imbecility of his intellect. We never did, at any time, exclude a

man from the kingdom of God for a mere imbecility of intellect; or, in other words, because he could not assent to our opinions. All sects are doing, or have done this.

Unity in the *domestic realm* is unity in diversity. A man and his wife become one flesh, not because they are alike, but because they are not. It is their unlikeness, their diversity, which makes physical unity possible. They are not uniform in their mental and intellectual attainments. Differences arise and arguments ensue in the very best of families. We do not assume that because a husband and wife differ as to which is the best brand of coffee that they no longer have a united home. We do not think the family ties are severed because a teenager prefers a stick-shift sports car while his mother insists on buying a large job with automatic transmission.

There never was a family in which every member thought alike and there never will be. Families stay together because their love for one another as persons transcends every other consideration. Their need for each other is greater than their need to be right on every matter of opinion. When a man and woman promise to love, honor and cherish each other as long as the two of them live, they enter into a covenant to receive one another as persons in love. They certainly do not pledge that they will always see everything alike.

Unity in the *governmental realm* is unity in diversity. I am thrilled indeed to be a citizen of the United States of America, but I am not so foolish as to think that all fifty states are alike, or that every citizen is agreed with every other citizen. I know there is a great difference between the elected representatives of Alaska and those of Alabama. Missouri is not like Montana, and Vermont differs from Virginia. It is our very diversity which makes it possible for us to exist in unity. Our national unity was born in the heat of debate and the constitutional convention which acted as a ramp for launching the Ship of State almost came apart before the vessel hit the water and unfurled her sails.

Those who postulate there can be no unity except upon the basis of absolute conformity ought to cross their fingers and "take King's X" every time they salute the flag and murmur, "One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." We are not agreed upon tariffs or taxes, legislative programs, executive powers, or supreme court prerogatives. We never have been. We have survived two hundred years, not because of our agreements, but in spite of our disagreements. We are held together by an ideal we have never reached, and by a conviction that every man is endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable rights and that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Unity in the *spiritual realm* is unity in diversity. Unity upon any other basis would make it impossible for us to share in fellowship with God. There is a great difference between the creator and the created, the potter and the clay, the shepherd and the sheep. If God had waited until I understood everything as He did before He accepted me, I would never have been able to share in His blessed fellowship. He did not receive me because I was like Him. If I was like Him I would not need acceptance. I would have been God.

The fact is that God took me as I was, in my ignorance and arrogance. He accepted me not because I was worthy but because I was not. And He did it because, in His infinite

grace, He was able to love me in spite of myself. The divine-human fellowship is one which spans vast areas of human ignorance. It makes it possible for the Maker to receive into His bosom those who cannot read or write, those who are not only ignorant of fine-spun, and even rough-hewn doctrinal distinctions, but who may not even be able to spell doctrine. The unity proposed by the Father is predicated upon faith, and that faith is simply trust in a person, a trust so great and powerful as to motivate the believer to commit his whole life and being to that person as Lord and ruler.

The word of God is quite plain as to the basis upon which we must receive one another. "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7). It would seem fairly obvious, I think, even if the apostle had not stated it so bluntly, that we should receive each other on the same basis as God received us all. The divine grounds of acceptance ought not to be improved upon by mere mortals. This means we will need to receive those who do not see a lot of things as we do, and never will. We shall have to receive them upon the basis of their faith in Jesus and in spite of some of their immature ideas and peculiar notions. The community of saints will never be a "united notions" complex.

When men respond to the good news about Jesus by their acknowledgment of the proposition that He is the Anointed One, the Son of God, and by being baptized as an acknowledgment of His Lordship over their lives, we receive them, for it is upon this basis God receives them. We no more assent to all of their opinions, ideas or concepts than God does. We do not receive them because of the number of things upon which they are right, but because they have been set right with God, being justified by faith!

It is tragic that men, searching for a text and a proof-text as a peg upon which to hang a sermon outline, would fasten upon Amos 3:3, and abuse and misuse it in such a way as to destroy the very fellowship which they profess to proclaim. One need not be a scholar of Hebrew to avoid the mistake of thinking that Amos made a journey to Israel to lay a foundation for unity in Christ upon the basis of doctrinal agreement. An examination of other translations would save him from such an error.

Robert Young renders it, "Do two walk together if they have not met?" The Revised Standard Version reads, "Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?" This is a good place to point out that any proposition which depends for its proof upon one version, and which can be sustained only by appeal to such a unique rendering should be regarded as suspect. It must be recognized that all subsequent translators could be mistaken and those selected and appointed by the King of England could have been right, but there is at least room for doubt when the later translators, looking at the original and having the King James Version before them, revised the rendering.

In our day of mobility and rapid transportation facilities it is easy for people to meet by chance and converse together. Every person who reads this will recall "running into a friend" unexpectedly at a shopping mall and engaging in an exchange of ideas. It was not that way in the time of Amos. When you saw two men walking across the open plain or desert you could be reasonably certain they had made an appointment, and it was no chance occurrence. So the version referred to above recognizes the

circumstances of carrying on a conference as the result of a previous engagement to meet. "Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?"

In Christ Jesus I walk together with men with whom I seriously disagree about a number of things. The truth is that I have never met a person with whom I fully agree upon all matters of understanding. If I must walk only with those who see everything as I do I will never walk with anyone. But I respect the right of others to read the Word of God for themselves, to make their own deductions and form their own conclusions. I do not want anyone else to impose his opinions upon me so I refuse to impose mine upon him. The same scripture which allows me liberty of judgment will allow it to all others who eagerly search for truth.

This is not, as some foolishly assert, merely "an agreement to disagree." Rather, it is a calm recognition of reality while we are imperfect beings in the flesh. As I investigate more fully I may be led to concur with the divergent views of my brother, or, upon the same basis, he may come to agree with mine. At least twice in my life I have differed with brethren in the Lord and both of us have changed. As a result we still differed but had merely shifted sides in our discussions. This did not affect our personal relationship in Christ, because it was not based upon conformity of opinion or understanding. We differed in Jesus, and not about Jesus. And there is a lot of room in Jesus for honest differences. The divine umbrella of love is not as narrow as are the hearts of a lot of those under its protection. It shades a lot of people who do not think alike or see alike. That is why it is important that we are to be judged by the Lord and not by men.

It is an interesting observation that those who head for Amos 3:3 for a text of unity, actually are not trying to promote unity at all. They are searching for grounds on which to justify their separation from others. Everyone of them postulates unity upon agreement with himself or the party or faction for which he is the front man. Each should make Amos say. "Can two walk together toward glory unless they agree with us?" Even if two were perfectly agreed after long and arduous study they would not be considered as faithful or loyal unless they agreed with the speaker. There have been occasions when as many as three different men used Amos 3:3 as a text on the same day in the same town, and no two of them could even agree on what they had to agree upon to walk together.

It is time for men to grow up and free themselves from traditional explanations and expositions which have long since been proven to be invalid. Men can walk together in Christ and not agree upon a host of things if they put Jesus above all else in their lives. What we need to do is to agree to walk together regardless of the attempt of Satan to fragment us into warring tribes and belligerent factions.

## Chapter 3

### ***ANOTHER GOSPEL***

It was my lot to grow up in one segment of a religious movement which, like many other such historical attempts to recapture the ideal of the first century community of the saints, had become fractured into rival factions. It had been inaugurated chiefly by earliest Presbyterians, with the assistance of a few worthy thinkers from other backgrounds, who were, as one of them phrased it “tired and sick of the bitter jarrings and janglings of the party spirit.” Accordingly they launched a program to unite the Christians in all of the sects.”

It was not the only project begun for this purpose at that particular period of time. There were a number of “restoration movements” whose adherents pleaded for men to “return to the original pattern as set forth by the apostles,” and a favorite title for sermons was “Seeking the Old Paths.” It is not essential to my present purpose to detail all of the tributaries which converged to form the rushing river of “The Second Great Awakening.” It is sufficient to say that under its influence hardy thinkers began to proclaim to a frontier people that unity in Christ Jesus was attainable in the wilderness of a fresh new world, provided that all men would search the scriptures and “restore the ancient order of things.”

All of these movements without exception, eventually became both divided and divisive, contributing to the “jarrings and janglings” which they started out to eliminate. The particular movement with which I was directly affiliated, and of which I became an ardent defender, was doomed to become one of the most fragmented upon the contemporary American scene. It ended up with more than one division for every decade of its turbulent existence from the day of its beginning until the present.

It is not difficult to assess the causes for the disturbing result. On the other hand, given such causes, the result was inevitable and should have been predictable. But hindsight is often better than foresight. One can more readily read the signs of the times by looking backward than by trying to scan the future. Frontier peoples, who are often deprived of those amenities which a stable society takes for granted, tend to define their learning and goals in capsule form. In this form they are easily remembered. Significant happenings are memorialized in simple ballads, wisdom is reduced to pithy proverbs, and life purposes expressed in slogans.

The real danger in this is that men repeat the slogans until they become a substitute for thinking. They remember the slogan and forget the purpose. In the particular movement with which I was identified one of the earliest proponents coined the expression, “We will speak where the Bible speaks, and remain silent where the Bible is silent.” This worthy resolution became the watchword of the movement and when it did, was translated by attitude and action into a weapon rather than into an instrument of righteousness.

More than anything else it tended to develop a proof-text approach to the sacred scriptures and men became “scrap doctors” as Alexander Campbell referred to them. The tendency developed into a way of life and men searched the scriptures to validate

presuppositions, and to find justification for what they already thought and did. A generation arose which spoke *where* the Bible spoke, but was not concerned in speaking as the Bible speaks.

When division in the family of God, which is always condemned by the Holy Spirit in the divine revelation, began to be sanctified by quoting passages to justify it, the flood-gate was opened. Every faction, fragment, splinter and sect could “prove” that its exclusiveness and separation was the will of God, sanctioned by heaven and authorized by the new covenant scriptures. Each sect froze knowledge at its own level, each established its own plateau, and each made additional discoveries above and beyond the partisan norm a crime punishable by banishment and exile.

As absurd and ridiculous as it may seem to the real scholar of the divine disclosures, every minor detail of difference and debate was branded “another gospel” and the unfortunate soul who had not stopped thinking when he reached the partisan plane was accused of “preaching another gospel.” He might be, and often was, the most spiritual person in the group, humble, prayerful and loving, but this counted for nothing if he could not conscientiously bring himself to remain confined in the partisan straitjacket of orthodoxy.

If he held a different view about the millennium, music, or missionary methods, he was guilty of “bringing another gospel.” Even though he accepted every word about Jesus as recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and literally steeped himself in their testimony, if he could not concur with the party position as to the time and meaning of “the thousand years” in Revelation 20, he was preaching “another gospel” and he was expected to be accursed by God after having been excommunicated by the sect.

As a kind of mitigation of the hardness and rigidity which settled down like a pall to halt further movement, it cannot be forgotten that it was alleged “respect for the authority of the Word” which created the sectarian status. A number of factors contributed to the condition. Basic to the entire system was the mistaken concept that we are still under law rather than grace, and that the love letters of the apostles constituted a written code of divine jurisprudence, the terms of which had to be enforced by certain men invested with the power to determine the conditions of union and communion for each developing party.

As a corollary to this false foundation there was an undermining of the real purpose of the new covenant which was to create an association of free men and women, joined to each other only because they were joined to Jesus. New yokes began to be hewn out to replace the one delivered to Moses and each party whittled and shaped its peculiar yoke to fit the cast of its leadership and recognized interpreters. Divine distinctions were obscured in the fog of factional debates, and men began to defend their novelties as ardently as their fathers once opposed them.

It is not easy to assess the relative importance of fundamental errors in the rise of any system of thought, because, with the passing of time, they become intertwined and matted together. In the movement in which I grew up I think one of the principal mistakes consisted in confusing the gospel of Christ with the apostolic doctrine addressed to those who had obeyed the gospel. Many forgot that the gospel was the good news of what God had done for men in Christ Jesus, while the doctrine consisted



of instruction as to what men in Christ Jesus must do to walk worthy of their vocation. Eventually the term “the gospel” became the equivalent of the whole of the new covenant scriptures, and one who held a divergent view about any passage was adjudged as being unfaithful to the gospel.

Since we will be pursuing the subject in our next chapter we propose now an investigation in context of the term “another gospel” as used by Paul in his letter to the Galatians. Here are his words:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

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.

As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6-9).

It is my conviction that none of the troublesome issues which create problems among those who are firmly convinced that Jesus is the Anointed One and God’s Son, the Lord of life, constitutes “another gospel.” Certainly when controversy arises over such matters as the millennial reign, or the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in our day, someone is wrong, and all may be. But neither side is proclaiming another gospel, and the accusation that either is doing so may be far more dangerous and damaging to the cause of Christ than the error under dispute.

One has not “left the gospel” or “deserted the gospel” who “through the Spirit waits for the hope of righteousness by faith.” He may be ignorant of the meaning of many things in the apostolic letters, and wrong about a lot of things he thinks he understands, but he does not “preach another gospel” when he expresses his views about his deductions and opinions. If we are to “speak as the oracles of God” and if we accept the letter to the Galatians as a part of those oracles, it is important that we determine what Paul said and what he meant by what he said.

## **Historical Background**

Galatia was a district located in the great peninsula called Asia Minor, the region we now know as Turkey. It was populated by the Gauls, a rude and boisterous people from the land of the Rhine who migrated into Greece, and about 280 B.C. went on into Asia where they carved out a home for themselves which came to be called Galatia, “the district of the Gauls.” Julius Caesar, who made their name familiar to every high school Latin student, described them as volatile, restless and changeable. The apostle apparently found the description accurate.

It appears that when Paul proclaimed the good news to them the first time it was because of a physical condition. It has been suggested that because of some weakness or illness he could not travel further and, rather than consume the time in idleness he preached the gospel to the inhabitants of the area (4:13,14). Characteristic

of their enthusiasm they received him “as an angel of God.” Borrowing a phrase from the Grecian games the apostle told them “Ye did run well.”

He was not gone from the region very long after visiting it the second time until disturbing reports reached him. Judaizing teachers had entered the area and were spreading the propaganda that one could not be justified by faith in Jesus. He must be circumcised and come under the law, or be lost. To further their nefarious course they sought to discredit Paul. They denied he was a true apostle, and contended that he was inferior to Peter and the other apostles whom Jesus called. They implied that whatever he proclaimed was a secondhand message, having been learned from the other apostles at Jerusalem. In view of this they contended, all must look to Jerusalem for the fullness of the gospel.

In that portion of his letter with which we are directly concerned Paul met their accusations head-on and without cavilling. He was not an apostle of men, neither by man. He was not commissioned by any man or set of men nor was he selected by human agency. He was an apostle sent forth by Jesus Christ under the authority of God the Father (1:1). He said, “The gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:11,12). He did not confer with flesh and blood, nor go up to Jerusalem to counsel with the other apostles, when he was called (1:16, 17)

Since the good news he declared was given to him by revelation of God and not by repetition of men, the apostle was astounded that those who had been introduced into the grace of God by that gospel, could so soon be lured away and seduced by another gospel, which was actually not another gospel at all, for it was not good news. It was at this juncture the apostle wrote, “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.”

What is the gospel? Before one can designate a thing as “another gospel” he must be able to identify the original gospel. The gospel, by etymology, is good news. It is not a system of doctrine, a philosophy of life, a compilation of laws, or a code of ethics. It is good news about a person and what that person has done for us in our hopeless, helpless and hapless condition. It is not a message for the saved but for the lost. It is never addressed to saints but to sinners. It is never proclaimed to the church but to the world.

The gospel is designed to make believers. It is intended to create citizens out of aliens. The word is our translation of *euangelion*. It is an evangel and you do not evangelize saved persons. It is sadly amiss to talk about preaching the gospel to the church unless the church is composed of those who have never come to Christ, that is, who have never obeyed the gospel.

The gospel which Paul proclaimed in Galatia did not originate with man (1:11). It was not the presentation of borrowed “sermon outlines.” It was the “gospel of Christ” (1:7), the good news about Jesus. It consisted of preaching Christ among the Gentiles (1:16). It was “preaching the faith he once tried to destroy” (1:23). What was that faith? “And I said, Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those

who believed in thee” (Acts 22:19). It was belief in Jesus which Paul sought to destroy. It was faith in Jesus which he later proclaimed.

The careful student of the Galatian letter will at once see that the good news was a proclamation that we are justified by faith in Christ and not by works of law (2:16). There was no good news in a reign of law. Those who rely for justification upon works of law are under a curse (3:10). No man can be justified before God by law (3:11). If justification were through law, Christ died to no purpose (2:21). If inheritance were by law it was not by promise (3:18). The utter futility of law lies in the fact that it must leave men dead. “For if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by law” (3:21). There is no such law, either human or divine.

Law confines and keeps under restraint. It binds but cannot free (3:23). It makes a person under it “no better than a slave” (4:1). Men had to be redeemed from it before they could even receive adoption as sons (4:5). It is impossible to be justified by faith in Jesus and try to be justified by law at the same time, because one binds while the other frees. One cannot be both a slave and a son, because the adoption as sons frees from the bondage of law. One who seeks to be justified by law, or by legal conformity, severs himself from Jesus. “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you are fallen away from grace” (5:4). Nothing is plainer than the statement, “You are not under law, but under grace.” You cannot be under both at once. The attempt to be will make of us schizophrenics in the spiritual world.

Salvation is a state of right relationship with God. Jesus did not come merely to keep us out of hell but to keep hell out of us. He came to reconcile us unto God. “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.” We do not enter this relationship by bargaining with God. We cannot earn it, purchase it or deserve it. We cannot bid on it or for it. It is not what we do for God that brings us into this relationship but what He has done for us. We are saved by grace through faith. It is not of ourselves. It is not of works. Study Galatians 4:1-7. “We were slaves ... but ... God sent forth his Son ... God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts.” We could not adopt ourselves into His family. We had nothing by which to purchase our redemption from the slave pen. “So through God you are no longer a slave but a son.”

Our response to the grace which sent a person to become sin for us, and to reconcile us, is faith in that person. This is what justifies. Justification has to do with freedom from guilt. We are not justified because we are guiltless for all of us are guilty. We are not justified because we have done something to free ourselves from guilt for no one can ever undo an act he has committed. Not even God can do that! We cannot “take back” what we have done. But Jesus is guiltless. He is the sinless one. If we are in Jesus we are not in a sinless state but in a sinless person. If we trust in his righteousness, that faith or trust is reckoned unto us as righteousness, or justification. Justification must always be a gift of God. We cannot give anything to God to meet a need of His. We must be always on the receiving end.

To one who works, what he receives must be counted as wages. It is not a gift. One who works has something coming to him, but no man has anything coming from God. He cannot be placed in our debt. We cannot keep books on God or “figure our own time.” “To one who does not work, but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is

reckoned as righteousness” (Romans 4:5). To be in Christ does not mean we have not sinned. It does not mean our sinful acts have been undone. It does not mean that we are guiltless. It simply means that in Christ Jesus God can treat us as guiltless. He can, through Jesus, reckon our faith as righteousness and not reckon our sins.

The gospel is the good news, the glad tidings, the joyful announcement of that justification by faith in Christ Jesus. It is the welcome communication from heaven that by trusting in Jesus in complete surrender and commitment, God will regard us as if we were without sin, since we are in one who is in that state. This is the gospel which Paul proclaimed in Galatia. It was the good news that Jesus was not as powerless as Greek wisdom and Jewish legalism. Salvation was not hinged upon arriving at wisdom or coming under the law, but coming into a person! God has made Him “our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

The gospel is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the good news, the greatest good news in all the history of sinful man. Paul declared that the message brought to Galatia was “Jesus Christ publicly portrayed (or placarded) as crucified” (3:1). *The truth* of that gospel, that is, the essence, the basis, the central theme was justification by faith in Jesus Christ. Truth is reality, stripped of all extraneous matter and naked of all artificial covering. The glad tidings to the world consisted of announcement of the most tremendous, magnificent and earth-shaking principle in the universe — that justification is by faith in the Son of God. This is the core of the message. This is “the truth of the gospel.”

Shortly after Paul had gone from Galatia, members of the circumcision party came and told those who had heard the good news that something else was required, that faith in Jesus was not sufficient. No doubt their message was the same as that which they promulgated in Antioch, “Except ye be circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). When the controversy waxed hot in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem to consult the apostles and elders. They took Titus along as a test case. They encountered “false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage — to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you” (2:4, 5). Paul was not here talking about the veracity of the gospel. If he yielded on this occasion, the principle of justification by faith, *the truth* of the gospel, would have been washed down the drain by the flood of legalism.

When Peter went to Antioch he ate with the Gentiles, until certain men came from James at Jerusalem. “When they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party” (2:12). This was a repudiation of the principle of justification by faith in Jesus and an adoption of the tenet of the party — you must believe in Jesus *and something more* to be in the fellowship. Peter caused a division with his unwritten creed. Others were drawn into the faction, including Barnabas. Paul saw that “they were not straightforward about *the truth* of the gospel.” Do not be mistaken. Peter still believed in Jesus. So did Barnabas. But they lent their influence to those who insisted that this was not enough to be justified.

Paul proceeds to define the truth of the gospel in one of the most sublime passages in the Galatian letter. “We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified” (2:15,16). To profess this as the marrow, or kernel of the gospel, and then, under partisan pressure, tack something else on to it as a condition of salvation, is to act insincerely and to be “not straightforward about the truth of the gospel.”

Those who were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things, but they were not charged with “preaching another gospel.” Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to Him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.

No honest opinion held by one who is in Christ Jesus and who respects His Lordship, is “another gospel.” Since it is the gospel which forms the basis of the fellowship with the Father, the Son, and with one another in Christ, such an opinion can never be made a test of union or communion in Jesus. A man may hold a view as to the perseverance of the saints, the manner of the resurrection, or the second coming of our Lord, and he may prove to be as wrong as one could be, but he cannot be debarred from citizenry in the kingdom of heaven by the other subjects, any more than one can be disenfranchised in the United States because he disagrees with the government space program or the approach to overseas help.

No man “preaches another gospel” simply by being mistaken about some aspects of the will of God, otherwise one would need to know perfectly the divine will or he would be a perverter of the gospel. It is common in our day for some to level the charge at their brethren who disagree with them over some means or method for implementation of God’s will that they are “preaching another gospel” and “apostatizing.” Those who do this, regardless of motive, reveal their ignorance of what constitutes both gospel and apostasy.

We need to give serious thought to the problem of “another gospel” because there is a grave danger that those who are most vociferous in their accusation that others are preaching “another gospel” are treading on thin ice. They may be guilty of the very thing of which they accuse others. Actually there is no such thing as another gospel and cannot be. The gospel is the good news that we are justified by faith in Christ Jesus. Anything else is just not gospel. That is why Paul said, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel — not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

To offer justification, or right standing with God, upon some other basis than trust in Jesus, may appear to those who hear it to be “a gospel.” They may regard it as such and even accept and designate it as such. Ultimately they will learn it could not deliver what it offered, and that there is only one basis for a right relationship with God. Then that which appeared so plausible and convincing, which seemed so rational and documented, will be shown to be empty and frustrating, and not good news at all.

When men make a test of union or communion out of some method, mode or machinery for accomplishing God’s will and refuse to recognize as in the fellowship those who do not concur in their special brand of orthodoxy, they hinge justification upon faith in Jesus Christ and *something else*. The “something else” is agreement with their understanding, inference or deduction from the scriptures as regards that thing. Their creed is no longer simply Christ but conformity with a factional pattern. Whatever any party makes a test of fellowship is its creed. Whatever one must accept to be regarded as loyal is a creed.

To make one’s right standing with God depend upon standing right upon other things rather than upon surrender of himself in trust to Jesus, is dangerously near to perverting the gospel. This was the mistake of the circumcision party in the days of Paul. Let it be understood that Paul did not regard circumcision or lack of it as of any avail in establishing that relationship. “For in union with Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor lack of it counts for anything; but only faith that is spurred on to action by love” (Galatians 5:6). Many quote Galatians 1:6-8 and apply it to others when they are actually the ones who set up other unwritten creeds and pervert the gospel with their partisan terms of fellowship and justification.

Not every divergent view is another gospel. Not every area of disagreement makes the one who disagrees with us a perverter of the gospel. There are some questions which are in order and to which we should face up. Why do those who profess to love God seek so eagerly to brand their brothers and apply hurtful and prejudicial epithets? Why are they so anxious to set at naught their brothers for whom Christ died? Why are they so bent on smiting their fellow-servants while the Lord is absent?

Is this the “more excellent way?” Is this the royal road to unity? Will this accomplish the purpose for which Jesus shed His blood? Will it answer His prayer for the oneness of all believers? If God deals with us at the judgment in the same cold legalistic fashion in which we deal with His other children, will any of us be saved?

I would like to urge my readers to carefully consider a quotation from *The Declaration and Address*, written in 1809 by Thomas Campbell at Washington, Pennsylvania.

That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God’s holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians further than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so, for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but properly do belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church. Hence it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church’s confession.

It is a lack of discrimination which has been responsible for most of the tragic divisions among the children of God. Their zeal has been misdirected because of the lack of discernment and the inability to distinguish between things which differ. They have confused the good news which brings men into a relationship with the doctrine or teaching upon which they are to be nourished and nurtured in that relationship. They have confounded that which produces our very being with that which is essential to our well-being, and which belongs to our after and progressive edification or spiritual growth.

In closing I will provide another quotation which should give us all pause, when its content soaks into our consciousness. It is from the pen of Alexander Campbell, the son of the man who wrote the previous citation.

The present partyism is a disgrace to our profession. It is fatal to the progress of piety and truth .... The key of knowledge is virtually taken away, and ages of darkness are again spreading sable wings over a slumbering world. We must awaken from this sleep of death — this fatal lethargy that has seized the body ecclesiastic. Men are fighting about chimeras, loving and hating, approbating and disapprobating one another for reasons they do not comprehend, and, if comprehended, they would blush to see the illusions and phantoms that have bewildered them.

## Chapter 4

### **GOSPEL AND DOCTRINE**

*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:15,16).*

Incredible as it may seem, this has become one of the “twisted scriptures.” As a result, that which was ordained to save the world is used to divide the church. That which was designed to be glad tidings to hungry sinners has become sad news to harassed saints. All of the confusion stems from the fact that many have lost the scriptural distinction between the gospel, the Message to lead men to believe in Jesus as the Son of God; and the doctrine, which is a course of instruction for the training, development and growth of the children of God.

There is as much difference between the gospel of Christ and the apostolic doctrine as there is between the sperm from which a child is begotten and the food which he eats after he is born. The purpose of the gospel is to enlist men in the army of Christ; the doctrine constitutes a manual of arms and book of discipline to develop the soldiers into a fighting force. The first is an announcement that the school of Christ has been opened and eligible scholars will be accepted for enrollment; the latter is the curriculum for daily study by the students, or disciples.

Before we deal with the scriptural connotation involved let us understand why, what has become a traditional interpretation, is conducive to division and destructive of unity. The common fallacy assumes that all of the apostolic epistles are part of the gospel of Christ and any exposition of the doctrine contained in these letters is preaching the gospel. Since Jesus makes salvation contingent upon believing the gospel, and superficial students generally confuse belief with knowledge, it is further assumed that those who do not subscribe to the orthodox interpretation placed upon every passage thereby “reject the gospel.” Each sect, party or faction, thus makes its traditional explanations and deductions “the gospel” and we end up with as many “gospels” as we have parties.

It is easily understandable that the ones who so reason will conclude that only those who are allied with the party will be saved, and all others are outside the pale since they have not “obeyed the gospel” (that is, subscribed to the unwritten partisan creed). But we learn from observation, experience and the sacred scriptures, that we do not all have the same degree of knowledge. God has made us all to differ in the intellectual realm as we do in the physical. We can no more all think alike than we can all look alike. No two of us on earth attain to the same identical degree of knowledge about everything at the same moment. As Will Rogers remarked, “We are all ignorant, but just about different things.”

Any attempt to secure unity upon the basis of uniformity of knowledge or conformity in deductive or inferential processes (i.e., doctrinal interpretation) is doomed before it



begins. It must inevitably end in dividing that which it seeks to unite. For this reason, those who make such attempts must always resort to creation of external authoritarian power structures in order to compel conformity. This is generally done by investing a person or group with an aura of infallibility so that all non-conformity with the orthodox creed can be equated with rebellion against God. To dissent is to “deny the authority of the scriptures.” Every individual who desires to be regarded as “loyal” must surrender his right to reason and think upon God’s revelation to the “power bloc” and “unity” is maintained by legislation handed down, as well as by fear of social rejection by the group accompanied by reprisal for dissent.

### **Power Structures**

In one sect the power structure is invested in a “universal father” whose pronouncements when made *ex cathedra* (from the chair) are accepted as dogma. This means that this one individual decides for all other individuals in the group what God meant by what He said or did not say, and such decision must be accepted as the will of God. Other sects, finding it repulsive to their Christian concept to exalt one man to such cosmic importance, reduce the power structure from a universal to a diocesan level, where the bishop becomes the final court of appeal.

Still other sects set up a parochial or congregational “power bloc,” often consisting of a board of elders. Members of such groups are taught that to differ with the elders is to differ with God. The motto is “*Vox presbuteros, vox Dei*” (The voice of the elders is the voice of God). Every sect which confuses community with conformity is forced to recognize either an infallible interpreter or an infallible interpretation. Of course the procedure is not always as systematized and clearly recognized as those we have mentioned. Sects are like those who compose them and are inclined to be systematic or slipshod according to the nature and temperament of their constituents. Thus, in some cases, the editor of a recognized journalistic mouthpiece may arrogate to himself the mantle of infallibility and be allowed to wear it by default. His office becomes the clearing-house for all problems and his decision must be accepted as final.

The attempt to make conformity to the party norm the basis of unity is further complicated by the fact that the rational processes cannot be stopped at a given level. Men who are capable of doing so will continue to investigate and will reach conclusions differing with their own orthodox views of the past. When they refuse to succumb to threat or coercion they will be driven out and division will result. Since it is only the more eager students and researchers who labor to improve their intellectual grasp it is evident that the thinkers will be excluded, while the guardians of the *status quo* will be retained to man the party machinery. Every faction seeks to freeze knowledge at an arbitrary partisan level, and every such faction does it by skimming off the brains from the top.

It is an outstanding achievement of divine wisdom that salvation is made contingent upon *belief of facts* incorporated in news, rather than upon knowledge of abstract reasoning or deductions drawn from doctrinal truths. The gospel is a unitive force because it consists of facts proclaimed by credible witnesses. These facts must be accepted or rejected. If accepted at all, they must be accepted as facts. All who so accept them are brought together in the one to whom they relate, regardless of

ignorance about matters, immaturity, or lack of understanding of what will be further entailed. No subject should challenge a divided church more than the nature and content of the gospel. We propose to examine the word from the standpoints of etymology, scripture and scholarship. We make no apology for the length of our treatise because of the tremendous importance of the theme.

### Meaning of the Word

Our English word "gospel" is from the Anglo-Saxon "*gode spel*," good news, and was chosen as the best equivalent of the Greek *euangelion*. This was formed by adding the prefix "*eu*," good, to a root meaning "message, tidings, or news." The gospel is an evangel and one who proclaims it evangelizes. One cannot evangelize saved persons, for the evangel is an announcement to the lost. Its purpose is to lead men to a state of salvation or righteousness. One who believes the gospel and is baptized will be saved from his past sins, his unregenerate state or lost condition. The gospel precedes faith and produces it. It is not a fruit of faith but the seed of it. The gospel is addressed to unbelievers and not to believers.

The difference between the gospel and the apostolic doctrine is readily seen by application of simple logic. Jesus said, "Go into the world and preach the gospel unto every creature." The gospel is to be taken to the world. It is to be proclaimed unto every unsaved person. But the apostolic doctrine was addressed to churches composed of the saved, or to individual believers. Not a single epistle was addressed to the unsaved in the community, although the obligation to take the gospel to them was referred to in one instance (Romans). The apostolic doctrine was to "the church of God" (1 Cor. 1:2), "to all the saints in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:1), and "to the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:1). The apostolic doctrine was not to lead men to believe and be baptized but to tell them "how to behave themselves in the house of God" (2 Tim. 3:15).

One of the clearest passages showing the difference between the gospel which begets as a precedent to birth into the family, and subsequent instruction given to the sons is found in 1 Corinthians 4:14,15. "I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." The gospel is the spiritual sperm, the seed. The one who deposits it in the heart is the father, on the basis of principal and agent. Those who are born are sons. Others may teach or instruct them, but they receive life through the evangel, or gospel.

This is borne out by another apostle, Peter, who writes, "You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable by the word of God which is living, and indestructible." The writer identifies the seed thus, "This word is the gospel which was proclaimed unto you" (1 Peter 1:25). The King James Version leaves the wrong impression by translating, "This is the word which by the gospel *is preached* unto you." The Revised Version is more accurate. The gospel had been preached unto them before the new birth and in order to produce it. The gospel was for the world, the apostolic doctrine for the church.

With that keen sense of discrimination which characterized many of the pioneers who sought to unite the Christians in all of the sects, Alexander Campbell wrote:

There was teaching, there was singing, there was praying, there was exhortation in the Christian church, but preaching in the church, or to the church is not once mentioned in the Christian scriptures!

Paul once, in his first letter to the church in Corinth, said he would declare to the Corinthians that gospel which he had preached to them, which also they had received and wherein they stood. We preach, or report, or proclaim news. But who teaches news? Who exhorts news? We preach the gospel to unbelievers, to aliens, but never to Christians, or those who have received it (*Millennial Harbinger*, April, 1862).

William Hurte, a sincere and humble student of the word of God, was laboring among the fishing villages along the Banffshire coast in Scotland in 1879, when he saw the need for an expository work which would help the villagers to understand more fully the revelation from heaven. He began work on *A Catechetical Commentary* which was finished in October 1884. In this volume the author presents four thousand questions on the new covenant scriptures and his answers thereto. Here are his remarks about Acts 5:42:

The apostles rejoiced and went on with their work; but why does Luke use the two words “teach and preach Jesus Christ?” The words simply indicate the two classes to whom they were daily ministering. To the unconverted they preached, and to this class this word is strictly applicable, while believers were taught all things needful for life and godliness. To the former it is, and always must be, proclamation — i.e., preaching — while to the latter it must always be instruction concerning the Lord’s will.

### **The Scriptural Usage**

Every kingdom must stand in two relationships to the people of the earth. There are aliens and citizens. The kingdom of heaven is no exception, since it is the design of heaven to enroll as many aliens as possible into citizenry, and to train those who are inducted to become worthy citizens, there must be two separate and distinct messages from heaven. Both messages will be the word of God, but they will differ as to subject, content and aim. The first will be proclaimed to all men who have not entered into Christ and it must consist of such facts as will motivate the world to accept His sovereignty over their lives. The second must be a course of methodical instruction calculated to develop those in Christ from spiritual infancy to maturity.

The word of God informs us that there are such distinct messages and there are specific terms used by the Spirit to designate them. Since the messages are distinctive the bearers of the message are also distinguished by terms growing out of the nature of the messages. The announcement of news in the Greek world was made by a herald. The word for such a proclaimer was *keryx* and his message to the public, that is, the thing proclaimed, was the *kerygma*. This simply means a public announcement or declaration, as by a town crier. A herald might announce either victory or defeat. The news might be either good or bad. Thus, there is nothing in the word *kerygma* which indicates the nature of the tidings.

But the *kerygma* of the followers of the Messiah was universally and uniformly good news. It was a joyful message. God had done something out of love for humanity and that something was a powerful demonstration of the riches of His mercy. So an additional term had to be used to describe it. That term was *euangelion*, which means “glad tidings.” The bearer of this message was called *euangelistes*, that is, a bringer of good news. This good news proclaimed (or preached) by the herald was an announcement of victory in Jesus. It must be remembered that news has to do with facts and facts must be preceded by acts to which the proclaimer bears witness, or of which he has knowledge. In view of this, the *kerygma* took on a definite form. It was “the thing proclaimed” and that thing was called the gospel, or good news.

The chosen envoys of Christ had a special message for the alien world. That message was a proclamation of victory in Jesus. It consisted of the news of what God had done for those who were His enemies. Since it was contingent upon authority vested in Jesus, it could not be announced until the heralds had proof that He had been “Christed” (that is, anointed) and elevated to a position of universal lordship. The proof came visibly, audibly and experientially on the Pentecost following His ascension. Immediately the message was proclaimed! The gospel was fully and completely announced on that occasion. It was fully obeyed by all who accepted it. This was not a partial seed and those who were begotten were not born deformed or malformed. They were fully formed as God’s children, although immature, as are all children at birth.

Nothing else was ever added to the gospel after that date, although doctrinal truths were revealed as required or when circumstances demanded. These truths were not part of the gospel and no one whose life was corrected or enhanced by understanding them was ever said to have obeyed the gospel again. Obedience of the gospel is an act once for all while partaking of the bread of life is a daily performance. The gospel produces life, the doctrine is for the training and discipline of the children after they are born.

Careful study of the historical accounts of the proclamation indicates that it was a specific message as to content. It did not depend upon rationalization, deduction or inference. It was not a compilation of laws, a code of ethics, or a collection of abstract propositions. It was not a course of study or a curriculum. It was a simple recounting of facts, of acts performed in behalf of enemies of God, which, taken together, formed the *kerygma*. At this juncture we may correct a mistaken view of a familiar passage. We refer to 1 Corinthians 1:21, where the false concept is created by the rendering in the King James Version, “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

That this is important is evident from the fact that our hope of salvation depends upon it. Many interpret the word “preaching” to be the act of proclaiming. But God has not offered to save those who believe in the act of announcing something. The word for preaching at this place is *kerygma*. It has to do with the message and not with the action of the messenger. God has chosen *by the thing preached*, which appears as foolishness to the worldly-wise, to save those who believe. The later translations are more accurate in conveying the thought.

*It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe (Revised Standard Version)*

*He in his wisdom chose to save all who would believe by the simplemindedness of the gospel message (J. B. Phillips).*

*God decided to save those who believe, by means of the “foolish” message we preach (Today’s English Version).*

## **Content of the Message**

What were the constituent factors of the gospel? There were seven of these as follows: the life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, coronation and glorification of Jesus of Nazareth. All of these are facts centered around the person of Jesus. All are designed to bring joy to suffering humanity through faith in Him. Jesus is the gospel. He is the good news. To preach the gospel is to announce Jesus. Thus the apostle says, “We proclaim Christ — yes, Christ nailed to the cross” (1 Cor. 1:23). Again, “I resolved that while I was with you I would think of nothing but Jesus Christ — Christ nailed to the cross” (1 Cor. 2:2). It was by this message God chose to save those who believe and those who believe these facts and demonstrate the lordship of Jesus over their lives by obedience in baptism are saved.

The gospel is epitomized in the three saving facts — the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. There was no saving virtue for the world in the life of Jesus upon earth, sinless as it was. The ascension, coronation and glorification were essential to His acquisition of authority. It was the ransom and redemption purchased by His blood which made salvation possible, and it was the resurrection which brought life and immortality to light. By His death upon the cross He proved that He was willing to share our lot to the ultimate, by His resurrection from the dead He proffered us the opportunity to share His glory to the fullest. His death on the cross proved that He was the Son of man; His resurrection from that death proved that He was the Son of God. Accordingly, the apostle, in reasoning with the Corinthians about the resurrection, reminds them of the gospel which they had heard and which gave them life. The resurrection was a vital part of it.

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he arose again the third day according to the scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

An analysis of this passage will show that the gospel had been preached, received, believed, and that it constituted a foundation upon which the brethren stood. It was now a matter of memory, something to be recalled. It is observable that the Corinthians were saved by the gospel. The saving facts which Paul enunciated were three in number. Certainly the first epistle to the Corinthians was not part of the *kerygma* — the gospel. It was a *letter* written to those who had already received the gospel and were saved by it. The letter was not an evangel but a course of instruction. It was not for sinners, but for saints. It was not to make believers but to make believers better.

Of course not all who had believed the gospel were equals in knowledge. Some still thought there might be something to idols (1 Cor. 8:7); some thought there was no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:12); some were men of knowledge (8:10); others were weak brethren (8:11). There were those who were feeble, less honorable and uncomely. There were parts that lacked (12:23, 24). Paul hesitated to visit the saints because he wanted to spare them from personal censure (2 Cor. 1:23). He was afraid he would find “debates envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults” (2 Cor. 12:20). Yet all of these persons had been begotten by the gospel, and Paul mentioned the catalog of things to which we have just referred with the expression, “We do all things, dearly beloved, for your edification.” Those who confuse the chastisement of a child with begetting and cannot distinguish between conception and correction are in a sad predicament, yet that is the very condition of those who confuse the gospel by which we are made alive with the doctrine by which we are kept alive, through daily feeding our hearts upon it.

To this reasoning and the abundant findings of scholarship, the orthodoxy of our day, developed by debaters and concretized by tradition has but one pat objection of any consequence. An appeal is made to Romans 1:15, which reads, “So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel unto you that are at Rome also.” Assuming that the apostle intended to proclaim the good news about Jesus to those who had already heard it and long since accepted it, this is taken as positive proof that the good news is designed for saint and sinner alike and includes everything which should be taught to the church. It is hardly that simple and those who reach such a conclusion demonstrate that they are much more interested in justifying their preconceived notions than they are in unbiased exegesis. We propose to face up to this passage so glibly parroted by many who have never thought below the surface and who have fallen into the grievous error of searching only for a proof-text.

## **The Letter to the Romans**

Simple logic will demonstrate that the letter to the Romans was not part of the gospel because Paul personally desired to go to Rome to preach the gospel. This would not have been necessary if it was to be preached to the church and if this letter was the gospel. It would seem strange indeed to write, “I am ready to preach the gospel unto you that are at Rome,” if he was doing it at the very moment with his pen. Moreover, in Romans 10:16, he says, “But they have not all obeyed the gospel.” If the letter to the Romans was part of the gospel, none of them had obeyed it, for it was just then in the process of being written. Yet before the Holy Spirit had revealed to him the content of the Roman letter, Paul had already “fully preached the gospel of Christ” from Jerusalem to Illyricum (Romans 15:19). Did he give each of these places a copy of the Roman letter before he wrote it to Rome? If not, one can fully preach the gospel of Christ without reference to, or inclusion of the Roman letter.

Did Paul intend to preach the gospel, that is, to evangelize the saved in Rome? Careful analysis does not indicate any such intention. In the first place, this letter was not addressed to the congregation, or church, in Rome, but to the saints as individuals. In this respect it differs from the letters to Corinth, Galatia, Thessalonica, and other places. In his *Commentary on Romans*, Moses E. Lard says:

In other words, and briefly, it was written to all Christians living in Rome at the time. But it was written to them as individuals, and not as a body or church. This is a remarkable difference between the present letter and some others written by Paul. They are addressed to churches as such; this is addressed to individuals as such. Indeed, church unity or organization is not once alluded to or recognized in the letter, unless it be implied in chapter 16:17.

These individuals were addressed from two aspects: as saints in Christ and as citizens in Rome, as the called of God and as Gentiles. Paul expressed a desire to visit Rome for two different reasons. He wanted to impart unto the saints some spiritual gift and share in the comfort derived from mutual faith (1:11, 12). But he had also purposed on numerous occasions to come “that I might have some fruit among you, even as among other Gentiles” (verse 13). There can be little doubt that the “fruit” Paul sought consisted of persons won to Christ, and he wanted this “among you” on the same basis as “among other Gentiles.” Christ wrought in Paul “to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed” (Romans 15:18).

One purpose of the Roman letter was to inform the saints at Rome that Paul was specifically called to bear the glad tidings to the Gentiles. He wrote boldly about it so they would not forget his special mission.

I have written to refresh your memory, and written somewhat boldly at times in virtue of the gift I have from God. His grace has made me a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles; my priestly service is the preaching of the gospel of God, and it falls to me to offer the Gentiles to him as an acceptable sacrifice, consecrated by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:15,16).

Then why had Paul not come to Rome to win Gentiles? This would certainly be an important question to the struggling saints in the capital of the Empire. The answer is given:

It is my ambition to bring the gospel to places where the name of Christ has not been heard, for I do not want to build on another man’s foundation, but as Scripture says, “They who had no news of him shall see, and they who never heard of him shall understand.” That is why I have been prevented all of this time from coming to you. But now I have no further scope in these parts, and I have been longing to visit you many years on my way to Spain; for I hope to see you as I travel through, and be sent there with your support after having enjoyed your company for awhile (15:20-24).

Paul wanted to bring the evangel to the Gentiles in Rome. He was not so ignorant as to try and evangelize the saved. He wanted to have fruit among the inhabitants of Rome as among other Gentiles. He said, “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are in Rome also.”

Why did the apostle use the expression, “To you that are in Rome also”? There is every indication that he intended for the recipients of the letter to share its contents with their unsaved neighbors — both Jew and Gentile. This would be a natural reaction to an apostolic letter in an area where no apostle’s voice had ever been heard. This will also

serve to explain the nature of such portions as the entire second chapter, which is addressed to the Jews who make their boast of God and rest in the law, and yet dishonor God by breaking the law. It will also explain the inclusion of matter found in the last half of the first chapter. This portion of the letter was written to convince the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles of the need for justification by grace rather than by philosophy or law, both of which always end in a blind alley. Surely no one is so foolish as to think these portions are addressed to the saints of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is not a mere personal opinion of the author. It is shared by many who are more competent and eminent theological scholars. Space would not permit us to cite many of these, but one is very pertinent and needs to be read. Dr. James MacKnight was the author of *Apostolical Epistles*, and so universally known and highly regarded was his profound work that Alexander Campbell selected his translation for inclusion in his "Living Oracles" as he designated his translation of the new covenant scriptures. In the preface to his work, Dr. MacKnight writes on page 51, as follows:

From the pains which the apostle took in this letter, to prove that no Gentile can be justified by the law of nature, nor Jew by the law of Moses, from his explaining in it all the divine dispensations respecting religion, as well as from what he says in chapter 1:7,13, 14, 15, it is reasonable to think that it was designed for the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles at Rome, as well as for the brethren; who therefore would show the copies which they took of it to their unbelieving acquaintance. And inasmuch as the apostle professed to derive his views of the matters contained in this letter from revelations, and from inspiration, it certainly merited the attention of every unbeliever to whom it was shown, whether he was a Jewish scribe, or a heathen philosopher, or a Roman magistrate, or one of the people; some of whom, I make no doubt read it.

It was not only in his preliminary remarks about the nature and purpose of the letter that Dr. MacKnight expresses this thought. In dealing with Romans 1:15, to which we have already made reference, he makes the following observation.

In regard that Paul, after acknowledging he was bound to preach the gospel both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, adds, I am "ready to preach the gospel even to you who are in Rome," the idolatrous inhabitants of Rome were certainly included in the expression "you who are in Rome." This verse, therefore, as well as the following, is a proof that the epistle to the Romans was intended, not for the Roman brethren alone, but for unbelievers also, to whom copies of it might be shown.

### **The Righteousness of God**

But we will be asked about Romans 1:17, which says of the gospel, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." Does not the righteousness of God include all God has revealed, and does not this embrace the whole of the new covenant scriptures? If so, does not "the gospel" refer to everything in the new covenant scriptures? It is a common resort of orthodoxy to quote, "For all thy commandments are righteousness" (Psalm 119:172) and then take this passage from the old covenant



scriptures and apply it to the letter of Paul, and reason that the gospel includes every commandment of God, regardless of nature or intent.

This is a good example of what happens when men scrap the scriptures and become hooked on the proof-text method of exposition. Aside from the honesty and integrity involved in such devious maneuvering of isolated passages as pieces on a chessboard, there is another factor involved in this instance which must not be overlooked. Those who make such an argument to bolster their presuppositions must rely solely upon the King James Version for the validity of their logic.

The Revised Standard Version reads, "For all thy commandments are right." The New English Version has it, "For thy commandments are justice itself." Again, let me suggest that it is a fairly safe rule that any argument which must depend for its whole strength upon the rendering of only one version should not be given much prominence, to say the least. The fact is that David was not even dealing with the same theme in his lengthy psalm, as Paul had in mind when writing to the Romans.

What does Paul mean by "the righteousness of God" which is revealed in the evangel and is the subject of the good news? The Greek word here is *dikaioσune*, and it is a favorite of Paul. He was versed and grounded in the old covenant scriptures, having been at the head of his class in the rabbinical school of Hillel in Jerusalem. He knew that the old covenant scriptures constituted a primary and elementary school to provide a vocabulary for the school of Christ. The Hebrew terms which corresponded to *dikaioσune* were all derived from a verb — *tsadhaq*. The idea most frequently contained in these terms is that of vindication or justification. The meaning of the words does not imply that a righteous person is one who is right about things, but that he is "in the right," that is, in a state of righteousness, or justification. He is not infallibly right because of his actions, but wholly *in the right* by an act of God. That is why it is called "the righteousness of God."

Remembering that this is the word for "justification," we can readily see that no sinner can ever justify himself. He can never undo a single act nor recall a single word in order to become guiltless. He can never be justified by law because this would entail perfect conformity in every minute and meticulous detail, and the least infraction would mean death without mercy. Justification is an act of divine clemency, accorded not because of worthiness, nor because of anything that the guilty person may do to earn or deserve it. It is a manifestation of grace, a divine act of undeserved kindness.

We can now begin to appreciate what Paul meant in the memorable passage before us. In the gospel, that is the Good News about Jesus, is revealed the ground of God's righteousness, or justification. It is shown to be by faith in the Person of the Message. Indeed the Person is the Message. And the reason for revealing in the Message that God's righteousness is by faith, is simply to produce faith in us, for even the prophet had declared that the source of life is faith — not law! Those who are justified are those who are in contact with the source of life. Righteousness is a state of right relationship with God, and God is the fountain of all life.

We are not justified or in God's righteousness because of superior knowledge, or because we have figured out all the riddles and solved all the problems of life. Salvation and sophistication are not the same. We are not justified because of

intellectual powers or theological attainments. We could never know all there is to know if our lives depended upon it. We can be thankful that it does not. Our life depends upon being in the only person from whom all life comes, and our being depends upon sharing His life. Years before Christ came, the prophet had declared, "The just *shall live* by faith." Paul contends that this life is now available. It has come. It is revealed in the Good News of Jesus. It is no longer future. It is present. The age of which the prophets spoke is a reality. I want you to bear with me now as I paraphrase for you Romans 1:15-17.

Brethren, I should like to have you know that I frequently planned to visit you at Rome so that I could gather in converts to Jesus as I have done among other Gentiles. Because of my indebtedness to all tongues and classes, I am eager to preach the gospel to those of you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the Good News concerning Jesus; seeing that it is God's dynamic to produce salvation in all who believe the News, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in this Message God has revealed that justification is by faith, and this revelation is made to produce faith as our only hope of life, for even the prophets declared that faith was the key to life for those who are justified.

Certainly this is a "free translation" but, after years of study in the implication of these words of the Spirit, I am convinced that it best conveys the mind of God as I understand it to be revealed. It will also be observed that it preserves the basic core of the gospel which is justification by faith. This is what Paul calls "*the truth* of the gospel" (Galatians 2:5, 14). The glad tidings about Jesus constitute a revelation that justification is by faith, in the full meaning of "faith" as Paul uses the word. It is only the apostolic usage with which we are concerned. All else is useless to one who wishes to understand the revelation of God

### **The Gospel Dynamic**

The careful student will also detect at once the connection between Romans 1:16 and Mark 16:16 with which we began this chapter. In the commission Jesus sent the apostles into all the world to proclaim the gospel to every creature. He declared that those who believed the Message and were immersed would be saved. Now, Paul affirms that the Message is God's dynamic unto salvation to all who believe, whether Jew or Greek. Thus, the gospel is God's unitive force for mankind. It is the gospel which brings Barbarians and Greeks, wise and unwise, together in one body.

It is a tragedy to interpret the apostolic epistles in such a manner as to negate the apostolic gospel. It is a travesty on the spiritual walk to interpret the apostolic doctrine in such a way as to divide those who are united by the gospel of Christ, and thus make the cross of Christ of none effect. Orthodoxy has exacted a fearful toll on the body of our Lord, and will face a frightful responsibility for hacking the body to bits with the axe of partisan animosity.

It is belief of the facts about Jesus by which all of us are saved, if saved at all. This belief acknowledges His lordship over our lives, and thus commits us to acceptance of all the truths by which we grow as we become aware of them. No man will be saved who deliberately rebels against any doctrinal truth which he understands and

apprehends. No one will be lost because of merely mistaken views or human inability to grasp all of these doctrinal truths. The basis of our hope lies in sustaining a right relationship with God through Christ Jesus. If one is right about Jesus he may be wrong about a lot of things and still be saved; if he is wrong about Jesus he can be right about everything else and still be lost. The gospel is the Word of life put into words of life!

Many in our day are not actually proclaiming the gospel of Christ as the hope of salvation. They are projecting a system composed of traditional interpretations, opinions and ideas, often conflicting with each other, and demanding conformity to this system as the gospel. Such a course will always be divisive and schismatic. It contains the germ of strife implanted within it. It is non-unitive and disruptive by its very nature.

This is not to say that apostolic doctrine is not important. It does not argue that we should not seek to agree upon interpretation. It does mean, however that our hope of life is not contingent upon arriving at such harmony of understanding, and that it is, and always will be, an ideal toward which we must strive. Our differences about doctrinal matters that do not relate to the facts of the gospel, are occasions for discussion, and not for division. Until we learn what is the content of the gospel we shall lose the learned and confuse the unlearned.

Not one of the apostolic letters was written to bring men into the fellowship. They were all addressed to those who were in it. Never an admonition to live in harmony or to be of one mind was written to bring men into the fellowship. Indeed, it was because they were in the fellowship that these exhortations were invariably given. Harmony is not essential to entrance into fellowship, but fellowship is essential to any satisfactory striving toward harmony. It is because we have a common relationship that we labor toward a better understanding.

To condition fellowship upon conformity in all of these phases is not to encourage unity, but division. To attempt to force conditions of growth as conditions of family relationship is to defeat the purpose of the Son of God and to disturb the peace of the one body. This is the indictment of that species of orthodoxy which blinds men and makes them think they are loyal to Jesus when they are chipping, chopping and carving His body to bits.

Our brethren need that gift of grace which enables them to “distinguish between things that differ.” The cause of pure Christianity suffers among the masses because men who pose as teachers, and even would-be theologians stand before audiences and make disparaging remarks about any distinction in such words as “gospel” and “doctrine.” If the only harm done was to prove the immaturity and mediocrity of their own scholarship one might keep still and allow them to bask in the feeble glow reflected and diffused through the veil which they wear in their reading of the Word, but they hinder the progress of reformation and remove the contest from the arena of universal thought to confine it to their own restricted corrals where none dare question and all must conform. It is for this reason that an examination of the scriptures in objective fashion is long overdue. There is a difference between the authority of the sacred scriptures and the authority of human interpretations placed upon them to maintain a traditional pattern and to perpetuate a partisan program.

The time has come to summarize what has been written. It is my conviction that God has designed and revealed two related but distinct messages, adapted to the needs of two divergent groups as pertains to the kingdom of heaven — aliens and citizens. The first is called “the gospel of Christ,” the second “the apostles’ doctrine.” Both are of divine origin. Both consist of the words of God. Both are authoritative because of the author.

The word *gospel* is our English equivalent for a transliterated term, the Greek *evangel*. It means good news, glad tidings. The gospel is composed of seven historical facts about Jesus of Nazareth. It was fully proclaimed upon Pentecost. Nothing was ever added to it afterwards. The same identical message was heralded or announced to every creature under heaven. The intent of the good news is to convert aliens into citizens. It is a message to the unsaved and never to the saved, for the simple reason that the saved have already fully embraced its every requirement and demonstrated obedience to its every demand, and are no longer aliens. Only the lost are subjects of an evangel, and saved persons cannot be evangelized.

The “doctrine of the apostles” consists of a course of instruction designed to bring citizens of the kingdom to a constantly increasing sense of maturity and responsibility. It is those who have been immersed in obedience to the claims of Jesus upon their lives who continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine. Fellowship results from the gospel, growth within the fellowship is the aim of doctrinal development. The gospel brings men into Christ, the doctrine helps them grow up in Him.

So long as men seek to make fellowship in Christ Jesus contingent upon conformity of opinion, deduction, understanding and apprehension of apostolic doctrine, rather than upon faith in Him through the facts of the gospel, that long will they be purveyors of partisan loyalties and fomenters of factional strife. The gospel needs to be proclaimed to the whole world, the doctrine needs to be taught to the whole church, and every truth should be accepted as it becomes known.

## Chapter 5

### **CONFORMITY OR DIVERSITY**

Because of the divisions which men have created to separate believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, many of you who read this chapter will be affiliated with religious movements utterly different than the one with which the author is affiliated. For that reason apology should probably be made for the special allusions to the "Church of Christ" which will occur. However, it must not be overlooked that there is a kinship in our state which makes what is said about one fragmented movement relevant to all of the others. We may not all be in the same boat but we are all in the same ocean.

Too, it is important that all of us look with serious concern upon the problems which plague others. Because of our basic trust in Jesus none of us are wholly unrelated. Even though the doctrinal disagreements in one party have little relationship to those in another, at the center of our faith all of us are closer than we sometimes admit. It is as the spokes get farther from the hub they tend to become farther apart. The matters which create such a furor in one camp are looked upon with disdain and designated as sheer trivia in another. Every faction regards its traditions as having tremendous importance, while denigrating those of others. Few in these days place any emphasis upon eating of meats and keeping of days, yet these were questions of grave magnitude to the primitive saints.

Some of those who mistake conformity for unity appear to be startled when they first learn that we suggest there may be unity in diversity. Actually we go much farther than that. We assert that if there is any unity at all it must be unity in diversity, if it is to be enjoyed by free men. There is no other kind of unity except for slaves. Our opponents themselves are proof of this. Not one of them is a member of a congregation where every person understands each scripture alike. Each party agrees upon the factional test which it has singled out and made the supreme issue. Upon every other matter the greatest latitude is permitted. Conformity does not make for better Christians, but for greater hypocrites.

Every group which contends for conformity of every member is inconsistent. Those who quote scriptures urging the saints to live in harmony under the delusion that unity and harmony are identical, misunderstand both human nature and the scriptures. There is a widespread notion that because the primitive saints were together and had all things common, and because they were of one heart and one soul, this means they all had exactly the same opinions and views of everything related to the Christian walk. Nothing could be more remote from the actual facts.

God made men so that as long as they are in the flesh they will be divergent in opinions. We can no more all think alike than we can all look alike. There is as much variety in our mental, as there is in our physical makeup. This is not an evil. It is good. It stimulates study and research. It is the soul of all discussion and investigation. Without it forbearance would be an unnecessary virtue and patience would become a lost art. Of even greater significance is the fact that if unity came by intellectual agreement rather than as a grace-gift from God, it could never produce a peace that *passes*

understanding. No one will deny that our human understanding is frail, fallible and faulty. Peace that originated with it would always be imperfect. A stream cannot rise above its fountain or source.

Our unity is in a person, not in our personal opinions. We are one *in Christ*. Ours is the unity of the Spirit. Nothing is more clearly taught in the word of God. The Spirit of God dwells in every child of God. There is but one Spirit and every one in whom the Spirit dwells is one with every other such person. Of course every one in whom the Spirit dwells will exert a conscious effort continuously to promote harmony and good will. He will be a peacemaker because only such can be called the children of God. But he will also recognize that harmony is a fruit of unity, and not the reverse.

God no more expects all of His children to be exactly alike than I do my children. Nor does he “tighten the screws” on them to enforce conformity any more than I would twist the arms of the members of my physical family. The truth is that His revelation teaches us we are different from each other, and it is because of this we are able to fulfill His purpose and carry out His will upon the earth. Mere likeness in every detail would make this impossible. A man is able to be one flesh with his wife, not because they are alike, but because they are not. Oneness is not exact likeness. Harmony cannot be produced by harping on one string but by blending the sounds from various instruments.

### **Areas of Diversity**

1. In the primitive community of saints there was a diversity of *gifts* (1 Cor. 12:4-6). “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one.” The variety is in the saints, the sameness is in the Godhood. To eliminate the variety among the members would make the purpose of God of none effect. It is only when they recognize the source of their oneness that they can achieve a common purpose. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (verse 7). What was said of gifts bestowed supernaturally will also be true of gifts derived naturally.

2. There is a diversity of *functions*. “For as in one body we have many members, and all members do not have the same function, so we though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Romans 12:4, 5). There is one question proposed by the Spirit which we need to face. “If all were a single organ, where would the body be?” (1 Cor. 12:19). The divine arrangement is expressed in the next verse. “As it is there are many parts, yet one body.” Our very diversity in function makes it possible to have unity in an entity.

3. There was a diversity in *understanding*. Some had to be addressed as babes in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1). Their grasp of truth was elemental. “I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready.” Others were mature. “Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom” (1 Cor. 2:6). The impartation of wisdom was always on the ability to grasp what was taught. There was a difference from person to person and from congregation to congregation.

4. There was a diversity in *knowledge*. The apostle Paul pointed out that all knowledge was relative (1 Cor. 8:2). God’s revelation is perfect for the purpose for which it was

given. Man's knowledge of it is not perfect. In the community of saints at Corinth there were those who were fully aware that "an idol has no real existence" and "there is no God but one." There were others who were not so positive. "However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through being hitherto accustomed to idols, eat food as really offered unto an idol; and their conscience, being weak is defiled." Thus the saints were divided into "men of knowledge" (verse 10) and "weak men" (verse 11). Yet they were both men for whom Christ died and to sin against one of these brethren was to sin against Christ.

5. There was a diversity of *customs*. It was true that in Christ Jesus there was neither Jew nor Greek, but it was also true that there were Jews and Greeks in Christ Jesus. These statements are not contradictory. The gospel did not require a Jew to become a Greek, nor a Greek to become a Jew, in order to be in Christ Jesus. It was only in Christ they were one. This required adjustment to local conditions upon the part of one who traveled from one area to another visiting the saints (1 Cor. 9:19-23; 10:31-33).

Ragnar Bring writes,

They were all one in Christ. Their unity was far more profound than a fellowship between those who hold similar views, or who think alike, or who are brought together because of social fellowship and equality. The unity in Christ Jesus was a unity which remained in spite of external inequalities, just as the unity of Christ with God remained and did not in any way become less when Christ emptied himself and became man, "born of woman born under the law" (*Commentary on Galatians*, page 187).

The nature of the unity in the early Christian communities was what made them so effectual. The world of that day was accustomed to a unity of exclusiveness which existed in fraternities and burial societies. In these people were brought together through mutual regard for each other and because of common secular interests. There was nothing strange about a synagogue composed of Freedmen, even in Jerusalem (Acts 6:9). But to find a congregation made up of men of different habits, customs, racial origins, etc., laboring as a unit because of a common love for Jesus this was impressive indeed. The deepest unity can never be that of conformity. It must always be unity which exists in and transcends diversity.

6. There was a diversity in *opinions*. The apologists for "the cult of the rubber stamp" can never successfully negotiate the depths of Romans 14. Here is a chapter deliberately designed by divine direction to tell us how to maintain unity in actual diversity. It forbids contempt on the part of one group for another, and forbids censorship on the part of the other. It begins with a fiat statement that we must welcome men who differ with us about matters of opinion, and not for the purpose of involving them in disputes or debates about the differences. "As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions."

The very next verse shows that those whom God has welcomed need not see everything alike. There is room in Christ for men to believe different things and still be one. One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables. What reply is made to this by defenders of orthodoxy. One man in Colorado who is the champion of a legalistic code of conformity as God's ideal for His family, declared in

print that there was no room for varied beliefs among those in Christ. He asserted that the only believer was the man who could eat anything, while the weak man acted through lack of faith. His predicament only becomes greater for he has God welcoming men who act through lack of faith, or without faith. The record says, "He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; while he who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God" (verse 6). Will our brother have people honoring God through their lack of faith?

Note the expression "in honor of the Lord." This is the key to many of our problems. When men cease to regard the Lordship of Jesus over their lives, what they do is not acceptable. But those who act "in honor of the Lord" may differ greatly and may be exactly opposite in their views about many things and still be accepted. No legalist can ever grasp this! He will argue that "one of them has to be wrong." Granted! Perhaps they are both wrong. Then how can they be accepted? The answer is that the basis of our acceptance is not that we are right about everything. This would require no grace to save us. Why is this not the basis of our acceptance? For the simple reason that the kingdom of God does not mean being right about such things. It is in a wholly different sphere and upon a different plane. Being correct or mistaken about such things as observing days and eating meats does not affect our standing in it. There can be "diversity of opinions" about all those things in which the kingdom does not consist without affecting the constituency of the kingdom. "For the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (verse 17).

When I think of the implications of this revelation from God, I am startled to realize how we destroy the work of God over matters wholly irrelevant to the kingdom of God. What we are doing, of course, is trying to make the kingdom after our own image. By seeking to become lords over the faith of others we end up being our own God. Each conformist uses himself as a criterion. Men must know as much as he knows, see things as he sees them, interpret passages as he explains them, hold the same opinion that he holds. Divergency is a sin, not because of disagreement with the party, for the party is but a projection of the partisan. It is a sin because it does not recognize his infallibility. To question him is to question God.

When another "infallible leader" arises in the party there must be a division. The party is the world, the religious universe of the factionalist, and there cannot be two infallible interpreters in the same world while they differ with each other. In case of difference each must have his own world. Every factional leader thinks of his party as the one holy, apostolic and catholic church of God on earth. This is the position of the Roman pope as respects his party. It is also the position of all the lesser papas in all of the orthodox parties of our day. True, in the changing climate of our day the pope has had to reluctantly refer to others as "our separated brethren" as do lesser popes refer to "brethren in error." Yet there comes to all of us in the controversies over means, methods and measures, the solemn warning, "Do not for the sake of food, destroy the work of God" (Romans 14:20). Does this principle apply to that which sustains a factional body as well as to that which feeds the physical body?



## One Voice

We want to refer to one matter in connection with this which is so apparent that only those who are blinded by prejudice can fail to see it. Let us remember that when Paul wrote to the Romans the questions relating to eating of meats and observance of days were of tremendous importance and significance. They seem inconsequential to us now because they are not our problems. They have been displaced by other issues which will some day seem as trivial to others as questions about eating of meats seem to us now. But brethren were destroying each other over these matters when Paul wrote. The church was being shattered. These matters were made tests of fellowship and communion. If one had told the first century saints that the time would ever come when these would no longer trouble the body they would not have believed it. It will help us to remember the conclusions of the apostle.

The entire chapter (Romans 14) is given over to showing that men should respect and treat each other as brethren in spite of differing personal convictions upon these issues. The word “brother” occurs over and over and the expression “your brother” is of special importance. The theme is that brotherhood is a relationship created when God receives us (verse 3) and we need not agree with each other upon everything either to become brothers or to continue as such. After showing that we may maintain our divergent views and emphases, and be answerable only to God for them, the apostle concludes, “May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in *such harmony* with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with *one voice* glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (15:5, 6).

Harmony with one another, and accord with Christ Jesus, are not contingent upon seeing everything alike. We do not have to settle all of our differences to be in harmony with one another. Harmony does not consist of seeing everything alike on the *understanding* level, but of welcoming one another on the *faith level*. This is a higher level upon which peace that passes understanding is created by the death of Jesus. He did not die to create a union of philosophers but a family of brothers. To predicate unity upon understanding is to sublimate faith to human knowledge, that is, to destroy the greater with the lesser. This makes the cross of Christ of none effect. Those in Christ do not have to settle all of their differences. All they need to do is to settle their differences *in Christ*, that is, to make the relationship He created by His blood greater than anything about which they differ.

Notice again the expression “one voice.” It would be foolish for the apostle to devote a whole chapter to proving that men did not have to hold the same views or express the same ideas about a great many troublesome things, and then end up by saying they must all speak the same thing about every point of controversy in order to please God. We conclude a community of saints can with “one voice glorify God” even while holding various opinions. The King James Version reads, “That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God.” To be of the same mind and to speak the same thing — as Paul uses the terms — cannot possibly mean to think alike or talk alike about every issue arising to trouble the saints, else the apostle made a serious mistake in writing the chapter of which this statement is the actual conclusion.

The harmony of mind is on the faith level, and so is the harmony of speech or testimony. It is “the faith of the gospel” which produces our oneness of thought and speech, not faith in our understanding or interpretation of doctrine or dogma. Men may strive together in the clouds who would strive against each other in the valleys. The battle of faith must be fought on higher ground than that of opinion, speculation, or mere human acquisition of knowledge. The tragedy of our age is that we have been so busy hacking each other to pieces on the lower slopes that we can never gather enough united strength to storm the ramparts. “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” I have resolved to fight by the side of any child of God who battles for that faith. I shall not stop to kill my brother before I attack the enemy.

### **Basis of Conformity**

Since every faction in the Christian spectrum exists on the basis of a special emphasis, either upon a particular scripture or a specific idea, what is the basis for the cult of conformity and order of orthodoxy in the “Church of Christ” to which I have alluded? I think it can be said without fear of denial that the basis of operation centers around 1 Corinthians 1:10. It is a twisting, warping and wresting of this scripture which leads them astray. It is astonishing that a passage written to offset and overcome division should be given an interpretation which can only produce and promote division, and which will open and aggravate numerous festering wounds without ever closing a single one.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

What does this mean? To what did the Holy Spirit refer by the expression “all speak the same thing?” What is it to be perfectly joined together? What is it to be “in the same mind and in the same judgment?” The quest for truth demands objective research into this language. We dare not evade it regardless of where it leads us. We must not color or shade it to justify sermon outlines in our portfolio. We can begin, then, by observing that when Paul admonished the Corinthians to “speak the same thing” he was not plotting sermon outlines or planning Sunday school lessons.

The expression occurs within a setting and must be understood in the light of its context if properly interpreted. The family of Chloe had contacted the apostle and informed him that the church of God at Corinth was divided into four segments — a Pauline party, a Cephasite clan, an Apollosite auxiliary and a Christite cult. Each person was affirming aloud his affiliation to one or the other of these factions. The apostle wrote, “Every one of you says,” and proceeded to show that they were saying they were not of the same party, or for the same leader. His exhortation to speak the same thing simply meant to desist from these factional identifications. It was given to cure a condition and must be understood in the sense of its application to that condition. The statement has not the slightest reference to conformity of opinion or interpretation. One did not have to speak the same thing about eating of meats, or keeping of days, for instance. There was room for differences in such spheres.

The fact is that Paul was not using an ecclesiastical expression when he urges the brethren “to speak the same thing.” William Barclay writes, “The phrase he uses is the regular phrase which is used of two hostile states or parties reaching agreement.” He translates it, “You should make up your differences.” James Moffatt, aware of the historical account of a philosopher who ran into the marketplace to stand between two warring factions of Greeks, and who uttered these very same words, translates, “I beg of you all to drop these party cries.”

Richard Francis Weymouth has it, “Now I entreat you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to cultivate a spirit of harmony.” *The New English Version* renders it “agree among yourselves.” Hugh J. Schonfield in *The Authentic New Testament*, puts it, “all hold together.” The apostle is not regulating expressions or voicing of ideas among those who are walking together in love. His design is to heal a breach or bridge an existing gap. “To speak the same thing” stands opposed to controversy or contention. “It is reported that there are contentions among you ... I beseech you to speak the same thing.”

Those who quote the passage to apply to enforced conformity and stereotyped expression are always inconsistent. They must leave broad areas where their partisans can say different things and remain in the factional fold. It is only upon the humanly formulated test of loyalty, the party shibboleth, that all must pass muster and walk the verbal chalk line. In the particular movement in which I was reared there are some twenty-five separate and distinct factions. Every one of these parties allows the greatest latitude in opinion (and often in moral and ethical behavior) except in the test of partisan identity. It is only demanded that, if one is to be regarded as “sound in the faith” he must speak the same thing on the issue around which the party rallies as its standard. “The faith” is the orthodox position, the totem pole of the party.

In every one of these parties the adherents differ on a great many things. They do not agree upon divorce and re-marriage, upon Christians bearing arms in war, or upon the qualifications of elders. All of these are considered as grounds for discussion while the party position is regarded as a basis for division. Who makes the decisions as to which things are vital and which are not? Who draws up the lists of things that are immune and exempt, and formulates the limitations and restrictions? Who surveys the extent of the yard to be enclosed by the fence inside of which the children may argue and fight while composing “the brotherhood?” Who is the supreme court to determine upon what bases we may “set at nought a brother” in absolute contradiction to the word of God which forbids it?

Perhaps the most glaring demonstration of inconsistency is found among those who compose the faculty of Liberal Arts Colleges, regarded as church-related schools and maintained by contributions of members of the Churches of Christ. It is generally known upon every campus that certain teachers do not share the views of others. Conflicting and contradictory explanations may be given of certain passages from one classroom to another. Yet, as a body, these have reached an official interpretation of Revelation 20, and one who holds, the pre-millennial view is excluded and often not regarded as in “the Lord’s church.” It has been decided that the authorized and infallible interpretation of Revelation 20 shall be deemed, and is hereby decreed to be, opposed to the

premillennial coming of the Lord, and this dogma shall be a test of fellowship, and of union and communion among the saints. Greater legalism hath no man than this!

The flagrant inconsistency of these college professors is seen in the fact that they laud as “giants” men who were avowedly premillennial in their interpretations. The books written by these worthies of another generation are required reading, yet if the men *who wrote the volumes were alive today they would not even be allowed to lecture to a class* composed of those who must pass an examination upon what they wrote. Since their day certain views have become part of the dogma. Fortunately, hundreds of alert young men and women in college are seeing through the incompatible and incongruous attitudes imposed by the factional spirit. A revolution has begun to restore Jesus to His position as Lord in practice as well as in word.

Thinking men and women can never be satisfied that all *must* understand Revelation 20 alike, while they *may* differ upon every other chapter in the Bible. Who determines the *must* and the *mays*? It is only those who twist such expressions as “all speak the same thing” into tools of conformity who must muzzle men’s minds in one area of revelation while allowing them to run at will in other sectors. Of course, this all stems from a legalistic attitude which results from fear, not from faith. Men know they will not see every point of interpretation alike. They never have. The libraries of thousands of volumes on religious themes prove it. If it were not so, no theological school would require more than one set of commentaries. It is interesting to see the variety of commentaries offered for sale by bookstores operated in conjunction with journals whose editors unrealistically declaim that we must all speak the same thing. There seems to be a lot of money made from the fact that we do not!

### **Fruit of Inconsistency**

The factional tendency which asserts itself when men realize that they do not always infer the same thing from what they read, is to fasten upon a particular item of belief, and elevate it out of proportion to other items, and even exalt it above the cross of Christ. On this matter they take a positive and definite stand, and judge every person by whether “he speaks the same thing” on this issue. The tragedy of such a procedure is found in the fact that it destroys integrity, both in the intellectual and behavioral realm. When one becomes convinced that his relationship with Jesus is established and sustained, and that his loyalty is determined, by his position on some item of controversy, every other consideration is relegated to secondary status.

Conformity as a basis of unity is a fantasy, whether in the realm of politics, economics, philosophy or religion. Conformity by coercion is the gruesome weapon of tyranny, whether employed by a single ruthless dictator or wielded by an institution which cannot stand dissent. It is contrary to the nature of man and becomes a yoke of intolerance. Thomas Jefferson writing about the *Virginia Act for Religious Freedom* in 1786, said,

Subject opinion to coercion: whom will you make your inquisitors? Fallible men; men governed by bad passions, by private as well as public reasons. And why subject it to coercion? To produce uniformity. But is uniformity of opinion desirable? No more than of face and stature.

It is regrettable that legalistic minds searching for a proof-text to reinforce the weak framework of a sermon outline on unity by conformity, have wrested from its context the statement of the apostle that all should “speak the same thing.” Nothing is more incongruous than to see partisan leaders quoting this at each other. It would seem the proper thing for them to do would be to provide an example of what they so loudly affirm. Bombarding one another with the same text in an argument is hardly a demonstration of what the apostle meant by speaking the same thing.

A great many students are perplexed by the statement “that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Surely if conformity is taught anywhere it is taught in this verse. Again, the problem is one of context. The expression “Be perfectly joined together” is *katartizo*, which carries with it the idea of restoring to the original state or condition. It was used as a medical term for reducing a fracture, or setting bones in a joint or socket. We still talk about bones “knitting together.” A good example is found in Galatians 6:1, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should *restore* him in a spirit of gentleness.”

It is employed in Matthew 4:21 and Mark 1:19 for mending nets. In these cases it is apparent that the idea is to correct a situation so that proper functioning can resume. This is the reason for setting broken bones, for restoring a member discovered in a trespass, and for repairing a net. The appropriateness of this term will be seen when we remember that the word for “divisions” in 1 Corinthians 1:10 is *schisma*. This denotes a tear or rent, as in a garment. It is used in Matthew 9:16 for the rent which occurs when unshrunk cloth is used to patch a hole in an old garment. The corresponding verb *schizo*, occurs in the word schizophrenia, a type of psychosis resulting in a split personality.

With this background we can grasp the significance of what Paul is saying to the Corinthians. The fabric of brotherhood has disintegrated through cleavage and the formation of parties. It was impossible to discern the one body even when they met together in one place, because they maintained their exclusive partisan associations (Cp. 1 Corinthians 11:18, 29). It was necessary to repair their grievous state so that the body could properly function again in the midst of a pagan society. Allow me to paraphrase the passage so you may understand what the apostle is saying to correct the situation.

I implore you now, my brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you stop your party cries so that the fabric of brotherhood will not be further rent and torn, and that you mend those rents which already exist by cultivating the same attitude and the same good judgment.

## The Repair Tools

We recognize that it is difficult for those who have been reared and trained in a legalistic attitude to surrender sermon texts and outlines which have grown hoary with repetition. They will fight to hold on to such heirlooms in spite of their lack of value, simply because they have been in the family so long. Accordingly, when full explanation is made in an open forum of the meaning of the apostle, someone who must make “a last ditch stand” always arises to demand what is inferred by the expression “the same mind and the

same judgment.” Those who have long postulated unity based upon conformity and scoffed at “unity in diversity” find it a difficult thing to swallow their partisan pride and say, “I have been wrong about the meaning of that scripture all of my life.”

I know from experience what happens to an honest man who has been defending an outpost under the mistaken concept that it is the whole territory when he comes face to face with his captain who demands that he haul down the partisan banner from above his walled fortress which he has so proudly defended. I also know the trauma which occurs when one must surrender his stock of ammunition, the scriptural passages with which he has been bombarding various camps of saints on the other side of the hill. I suspect there is ever the temptation to want to retain your side arms and continue to do a little partisan “bushwhacking” in your leisure time. So it never surprises me when a preacher in my audience digs in his heels, wraps the factional rope around his hands and hangs on for dear life while it slowly slips from his clutch and he looks wildly around for reinforcements, hoping the cavalry will come dashing down the slope at the last minute to save the party flag.

However, in this case, my own integrity will not allow me to compromise my conviction. I must insist that the apostle is not advocating conformity across the whole Christian spectrum as essential to oneness. Instead, he is dealing with a specific situation. The community of saints has disintegrated into four warring tribes, making the community of saints militant against itself. The apostle commands a repair job. He begins with an emergency measure calculated to halt the growing cleavage. “Stop these party cries!” (all speak the same thing). He then proceeds to the method of repairing the damage already done. “Mend the rents in the fabric” (be perfectly joined together)

A repair job requires tools. These instruments must be adapted to the task to be performed if the end is to be accomplished. The tool which Paul handed to the Corinthians for their work of restoration is labeled, “the same mind and the same judgment.” No other device could fit a situation such as there existed. They must have the same mind as to what they were to try to do. They must have the same judgment as to how to accomplish it. The first refers to purpose, the second to method.

To assume that what was absolutely necessary in correcting a critical emergency is normative for daily living and survival is indicative of shallow thinking. It is like insisting that one should throw away food and live on penicillin shots because this was prescribed when one had pneumonia. If all members of a household are aroused at 3:00 o'clock a.m. to rush one to a hospital with a ruptured appendix, we do not conclude they must all arise at that time each morning to demonstrate they are still members of the same family. Nor do we assume that because they functioned in such perfect unison under special stress they may not disagree with each other about many things and still love each other dearly.

There is room in Christ for differences. There is no room for division. It was division which Paul sought to eliminate in Corinth, but he only sought to palliate differences in Rome (Romans 14). You *eliminate* disease by curing it, you *palliate* a condition by easing it without curing it. The treatment for division is rejection of the condition. The treatment for differences is forbearance of your brethren. To differ with brethren is not a sin, to divide the family of God is a sin. We oppose division because we hate sin, we

seek to reduce tensions and lessen areas of difference because we love brethren. We must regard division with intolerance while we treat differences in a spirit of tolerance. Tolerance is not *endorsing* something which you think to be wrong, it is simply enduring one who thinks it is right. It is a relationship sustained to honest brethren and not to their ideas or thoughts. A brotherhood is composed of thinkers and not abstract thinking.

So long as division exists in the community of saints we share in its shame even while laboring to overcome it. If we condone or defend it we also share in its scandal. No one in the family of God can be wholly free of disgrace as long as strife in the family is exposed to the open gaze of an unbelieving world. Not one individual can justifiably adopt an attitude of indifference or unconcern when the Lord has laid upon all the burden of being peacemakers. This requires much more than being a passive peace lover. It demands an actively pursued campaign to restore peace — *to make peace*. It is not enough to boast that you have never caused division. You may not have caused anything else either! If division exists in the community where you are, regardless of who created the situation, you are obligated by the authority of God's word to do something to repair the breach.

This involves much more than a halfhearted invitation to another partisan preacher in the community to "Drop over sometime and we'll talk about our problems over a cup of coffee." It includes being able to drink the cup that He drank, and being baptized with the baptism He experienced. Peace must be waged. It must be relentlessly pursued. "Seek peace and ensue it." There must be a strategy of peace in which temporary defeats are never confused with a lost cause and skirmishes are not confounded with the war. Division must be seen in its true nature, as a damnable, destructive, defiant sin against God and the Majesty of His Fatherhood. The campaign for peace is not a game of tiddlywinks. It is an endurance contest which is not a struggle for men with weak hearts and sickly stomachs. Peacemakers must be "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

## Chapter 6

### ***CONTRARY TO THE DOCTRINE***

Any religious group which exists beyond the first generation has certain traditions, because the word tradition means “a handing over, or handing down.” A tradition may be either good, bad, or indifferent. Not everything our fathers thought and taught was right, but not all of it was wrong either. It is a fallacy to think that everything old is outmoded. It is as great a fallacy to think that everything new is deserving of praise.

Sometimes traditions develop as to the method of doing things. The sacred scriptures must be implemented. They must be translated into action. The written word must become our flesh. A popular English paraphrase of the scriptures has been called “The Living Bible.” Actually, it is no more a living Bible than any other translation, version or paraphrase. The real living Bibles are persons who are reproducing in their daily lives the image of Christ.

The word of God is unchanging. It is recorded in heaven but not necessarily in English. It was recorded there before English was derived and spoken. As men read the word and seek to carry out its implications for their lives they must select and develop means which seem to them best adapted to fulfill the requirements in their time. The means are not the scriptures, and may be altered as circumstances change. However, those who seek to do what God requires may soon confuse the medium with the message and reach the conclusion that to abandon the first is to forsake the second.

As one generation passes away, the succeeding one equates fidelity, not only with trust in God’s revelation but with adherence to the methods of the fathers. The tragedy of this is not that men continue to be ruled in what they believe by the living God, but rather that they are governed in how they manifest their faith by men who are dead. The grave has the same power as the glory. There may be nothing unscriptural about the tradition but if the human means no longer accomplish the divine will it is useless to retain them, much less to defend them as the will of God.

Sometimes traditions develop as to the interpretation of certain scriptures. Men in one age, beset by intellectual shortcomings and under constant attack, may search the scriptures for a means of defense of what to them seems God’s will for their lives. The constant employment of the meaning they deduce from and assign to a scripture in the heat of debate may become the orthodox explanation, the recognized and official interpretation. Hallowed by usage, the explanation becomes the scripture in the minds of partisan communicants. To question the exposition is to doubt the revelation.

All of this is further complicated by the inborn resistance to change by religious movements which develop ponderous programs and intertwined institutionalism. It makes little difference whether the institutions are church-supported or church-related. They serve as bulwarks against alteration and imprison the movements they profess to liberate. The day an institution accepts a trust fund or creates a foundation it forfeits the freedom to die. It is almost impossible to set a captive movement free when its roots are matted with institutional roots beneath the surface. The legal, political and organizational ties make reformation virtually impossible.



One thing is certain. The cardinal law which governs every religious establishment is self-preservation. The organization is concerned with two things — its image and its perpetuity. To protect itself it erects walls, digs moats and bars gates. Any suggested change is regarded as a threat, any new concept as a challenge. Dissent is treason and the dissenter a heretic. This is the universal stance of the sectarian spirit. Whether or not the sect bears a denomination coined to describe a facet of doctrine or government, or whether it brags of a name found in the scriptures makes no difference. The sectarian spirit is always the same, though “the theology” may differ.

We must recapture a sense of our integrity in the intellectual world. This does not mean setting up a false god of human wisdom or bowing at the shrine of philosophy. It does mean an unrelenting and unceasing quest for truth, and that for truth’s sake, regardless of what that truth may do to our cherished positions of the past. The retention of any dross for fear of losing some gold is contrary to the basis of true scholarship and subversive of honesty. We should not hesitate to deposit what we have in the crucible of the present, for that which does not stand the test today was not right yesterday, even though we thought it was. The gold must be tried in the fire, not just in one generation but in every generation.

It is in this spirit of freedom and fearlessness that we are examining again those scriptures which have been twisted to create, condone or continue division. Our thesis is that any use of the written word to defeat the plan, purpose and prayer of the Living Word is an abuse. This calls for a restudy of the bearing and implication of those scriptures. When our application of the word of God produces the very opposite condition of what the word was intended to produce there is something faulty with our application. Thorough study requires time and thought. It cannot be accomplished in a moment and it does not always make for light reading. Franklin D. Roosevelt, in a speech delivered in 1938, said: “Freedom to learn is the first necessity of guaranteeing that man himself shall be self-reliant enough to be free.”

### **Romans 16:17**

*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them.*

Of all the scriptures which have suffered from wresting, twisting and distortion, perhaps this one has suffered more maltreatment than most others. Written for the very purpose of protecting and preserving the church from division, it has become one of the chief instruments of such division. Ignoring the greater context in which it is set as a frame of reference, glib partisans apply it without modesty or reservation, to every honest dissenter from their factional programs.

The passage has been cited as grounds for excommunication of individuals whose consciences no longer allow them to kowtow to legalistic decisions or to “toe the party line.” Indeed it has been employed to justify attack upon a congregation, or group of congregations, whose constituents had learned that the will of God was not served by the factional spirit, and whose only sin consisted of asserting their freedom in Christ Jesus. It has been a verbal club in the mouths of partisan leaders to try and “hold in line” those who had continued to study and were no longer interested in goose-stepping

to a party tune. In the eyes of a sectarian leader anyone who differs with him is guilty of causing divisions and offences. He is acting “contrary to the doctrine which he learned,” for the doctrine he learned was the factional interpretation which the leader taught.

What did Paul mean by “the doctrine which you have learned?” Whatever he meant it was something in which the Romans had previously been instructed before the apostle penned this admonition. The expression is in the past tense. Since Paul had never been to Rome it is obvious that “the doctrine” is what he had taught in the previous part of this epistle, if he referred to what they had learned from him. In spite of that, I have heard this passage quoted and the expression “the doctrine which you have learned” applied to every little element of trivia which has disturbed the saints in the twentieth century. Every sect and faction regards its distinctive, peculiar and particular emphasis as “the doctrine you have learned,” and those who subscribe to these partisan hang-ups are urged and exhorted to “mark” those who do not. Indeed, there is not a rallying point for any sect, regardless of how small and insignificant, which has not been exalted to “the doctrine you have learned,” even though it has been taught but a decade or less! Certainly the saints in Rome never learned “the doctrine” which is debated in our day and used as a club to batter into submission or into silence those whose thought processes refuse to stop working!

It is almost unbelievable that thinking men and women could ever be led to believe that the apostle Paul would ever condone such a mishmash or hodgepodge as we have created, much less deliberately prepare the group in which we could sow the seeds of strife. Actually, such a position freezes knowledge at the partisan level. It makes ignorance a virtue and further learning a crime. If we are to listen only to those who agree with us in every particular we can never acquire additional knowledge. If we are to mark and avoid all who do not parrot our own particular party line we must continue at our present level of ignorance. Surely the apostle did not have in mind the creedal and dogmatic interpretation of each faction by the expression “the doctrine you have learned.” That would perpetuate the very factionalism he wrote to prevent and offset. It would seem that all rational and sensible persons could see such an obvious fact.

### **The Doctrine Learned**

What is “the doctrine you have learned”? What had Paul been teaching the Romans which would cause them to avoid those who were divisive? The entire frame of reference, the context both adjacent and remote, shows it was the teaching that *division among brethren is a sin*. The doctrine was that no one should cause division. Briefly summed up, the doctrine which the apostle taught and the Corinthians<sup>1</sup> heard was “Do not cause division or place an occasion of stumbling in a brother’s way.”

The content of the four preceding chapters is directed toward advocating, exemplifying and enforcing this doctrine. The basis of the teaching is, “Let us therefore follow after things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (14:19). Anyone who disregards this doctrine and insists upon making tests of fellowship where

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<sup>1</sup> The context would indicate that the author intended the word “Romans” (Publisher)

God has not made them (i.e., over days, meats, etc.) should be observed and isolated so his factional attitude cannot divide the body into rival camps over such issues.

The argument of Paul related to Jew and Gentile, and the universal need for justification by faith, concludes with the benediction and “Amen” of Romans 11:36. In chapter 12 he begins his dissertation on the conduct becoming the saints, especially as related to unity and oneness. His doctrine is that God’s family should not be divided. Its members should not be occasions of stumbling one to another.

Although many members, yet are we one body in Christ, and every one members one of another (12:5).

We are to love each other without hypocrisy (12:9); be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love (12:10); and be of the same mind one toward another (12:16).

We are to owe no man anything except to love one another (13:8), for love is the fulfilling of the law (13:10).

We are not only to deprecate strife and envying, but actually to abhor them, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ, making no provision for the flesh and the exercise of any harmful passion (13:13,14).

There will be differences among the members. Past environment, the present degree of knowledge, various temperaments, and other factors, will enter in to make adjustment difficult. Chapter 14 is an inspired treatise on those attitudes essential to preservation of unity in spite of differences. The foundation of the approach is laid in verse one.

A man who is weak in his faith is to be welcomed. “Without attempting to settle doubtful points” (New English Version). “Not with the idea of arguing over his scruples” (J. B. Phillips). “Not to determinations or reasonings” (Young’s Literal Translation). “Not for controversial arguments” (Authentic New Testament). “Not in order to pass judgment on his doubts” (Weymouth). “Not to pass judgment on his scruples” (Moffatt). “Not to criticize their views” (Charles B. Williams). “Do not discuss his opinions” (Charles Kingsley Williams). “Not for the purpose of deciding doubtful points” (Centenary Translation). “Not for the purpose of passing judgment on their scruples” (Twentieth Century Translation). “Not for disputing opinions” (Rotherham).

We are neither to despise nor judge one another (verse 3). We are to allow each to stand or fall to his own master (verse 4), and reach a personal conviction in his own mind (5). We dare not set at nought a brother, for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (10). Each will give account of himself to God (12), so I am not accountable for my brother’s conviction, nor am I accountable to my brethren for my own convictions. My brother is not answerable for me, and I am not answerable to my brother. Both of us are answerable to God.

The brotherly relationship must be more important to me than any thing upon which we disagree, and must be more important than all those things which threaten its disruption. Under no condition am I to allow any opinion, scruple or personal conviction to destroy a brother for whom Christ died (15). The kingdom of God is composed of values which transcend all matters of argument over things which disturb its citizenry. It is made up of majestic qualities which are universally accepted within the body — righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit — and to elevate any secondary

considerations to an equality with these qualities is neither acceptable nor approved (17, 18).

Jesus died for persons and not for their opinions or ideas, right or wrong, and those for whom he died must be more important than anything for which he did not die. It is good to do nothing by which a brother stumbles, or is offended, or made weak (21). A man must not do that about which he has personal qualms or doubts, "because his action does not rise from conviction, and anything which does not rise from conviction is sin" (23).

The strong must accept as their own burden the tender scruples of weaker men and not consider themselves (15:1). Each must consider his own neighbor and think what is for his good and will build up the common life together. We are all to accept one another as Christ has accepted us, to the glory of God (15:7). As God accepted us in our weakness, with mistaken ideas, warped views and unhealthful attitudes, so we must accept each other in the same state or condition. We must not make the kingdom of heaven to consist of our convictions attitudes or opinions, but of citizens who must be tolerant of one another in such matters, otherwise there can be no kingdom of heaven at all. The doctrine the Corinthians learned was not to cause division, but to walk in peace, making allowance for differences.

### **Factional Persons**

After having given this extensive teaching on avoidance of division and offences, the apostle recognizes there will be those who will not heed it. Even God cannot provide a doctrine that is proof against dishonest hearts or unscrupulous motives. There will always be some who refuse to serve Christ, but in their egotism and selfishness will create a factional atmosphere and seduce the minds of innocent people with smooth and specious words. There will always be men who set up their own little kingdoms, who recognize as brethren only those who recognize their opinion, and who will drive out the saints who will not bow the knee to them. What should be done with those who disregard the teaching about preserving peace and insist upon having their own way, regardless of the consequences? The answer is plain and forthright.

*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*

A careful analysis of this passage in purely objective research does not indicate that the apostle is advocating public or corporate action at all. He is not telling a congregation that they should excommunicate certain ones. Those who take such a position have to read into the verse their own ideas. Indeed, the Roman letter differs from other epistles in that it is not addressed to a congregation, but to individual saints, as we have shown in a previous chapter. The "avoiding" here recommended to the brethren is individual. They are simply told to steer clear of those who would create division and to stay out of their way.

The factional spirit is like a flame. It must always have additional fuel or it will eventually flicker out. It is like a cancer. If it cannot reach additional healthy cells or tissue it will

subside. It is obvious no one can ever create a faction without followers. If all of the brethren will simply hold at arm's length a smooth talker who advocates pulling away, he cannot harm the body. Factions begin when members start fraternizing and sympathizing with factionalists. It will help us to remember that every factionalist seeks to carve out a body after his own image, and it is easier to carve soap or soft wood. When a factionalist starts wooing you to join a movement to pull away he has chosen you for the same reason that a termite chooses its timber — you are easier to work on! One is complimented when a factionalist passes him by and ignores him. He should examine himself to see what is wrong when he is made the target of a partisan who seeks to manipulate him.

"Mark them which cause division." The word "mark" is from *skopeo*. This is the form of the word which appears in telescope, microscope, etc. It has to do with vision. It means, "to observe, watch, to keep an eye on." There is not one thing in this word which indicates any action whatsoever upon or against an offender. The action is all upon the part of the observer. It consists simply of keeping another under surveillance.

Divisions is from *dichostasia*. This is a combined form composed of a word for "apart" and one for "standing." It literally means "standing apart" and here it refers to "alienating one from another." It can be used to designate "divided loyalties" or to describe the condition that occurs when one segment of those who should be together allows a breach to occur which holds them aloof from others. Such a condition is a result and it proceeds from a cause. It is contrary to the will and purpose of God and one who produces the condition disobeys God.

"Offences" is from *skandalon*, from which we get our English words "scandal" and "scandalized." The original has an interesting history. At first it referred to the trigger of a trap, the part to which the bait is fastened, and which tripped or sprung the snare when the intended victim took the bait. Later it came to apply to the contrivance or instrument as a whole. It is essential to the efficient working or functioning of a snare that it not be recognized for what it is and its real nature be concealed. W. A. Vine said the word is always used metaphorically in the New Testament of that which arouses prejudice, becomes a hindrance to others, or causes them to fall by the way.

"Avoid" is from *ekklino* which means "to turn away from, to hold aloof from, to stay out of the way." There is nothing in the word which implies any organized action, or formal discipline of the congregation. Indeed, Vine says, "In exhorting them to turn away from false teachers, the Apostle is not speaking of excommunication, but of personal dissociation from the offenders." Albert Barnes puts it this way:

That is, avoid them as *teachers*; do not follow them. It does not mean that they were to be treated harshly; but that they were to be avoided in their *instructions*. They were to disregard all that they could say tending to produce alienation and strife; and resolve to cultivate the spirit of peace and union.

The brethren were urged to avoid involvement with the person under consideration by keeping aloof from him or staying out of his way. If there is no congregational action implied in the terms "mark" and "avoid" there is none to be found in this verse at all. Those who abuse and misuse this passage to separate themselves from another congregation of saints over some point of difference are the perpetrators of division.

There is a great deal of difference between keeping an eye on a brother who would make a partisan out of you and staying out of his way, and refusing to have anything to do with another congregation whose members sincerely disagree with some partisan interpretation. That is, there is a difference in keeping an eye on an infected member and taking a meat cleaver to the body.

J. B. Phillips translates the passage: “And now I implore you, my brothers, to keep a watchful eye on those who cause troubles and make difficulties among you, in plain opposition to the teaching you have been given, and steer clear of them.”

Adam Clarke says: “Let them have no kiss of charity or peace, because they strive to make divisions, and thus set the flock of God at variance among themselves, and from these divisions, offences are produced, and this is contrary to the doctrine of peace, unity and brotherly love which you have learned.”

James MacKnight paraphrases thus:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them who set up separate assemblies for worship, and who occasion the weak to fall by false doctrine, or by enjoining things indifferent as necessary, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned from me in this epistle, and avoid them.

In explaining the passage, MacKnight says: “The apostle had in his eye the Jewish teachers, who in many churches set up separate assemblies for worship of God (see Jude, verse 19), on pretense of greater orthodoxy and sanctity than others, and who would admit none to their communion but such as joined them in their peculiarities, and who represented all others as erroneous and impious.”

### **How Division is Caused**

There is no more prolific cause of division than the orthodox interpretation placed on this passage. All who equate “this doctrine” with a partisan interpretation and dogmatically demand conformity to it are destructive of the peace of the one body and are the chief offenders against unity at the very time they quote the passage to exclude or excoriate others. The church of God has suffered indescribable harm from such prejudicial expositors who have split the disciples asunder under guise of loyalty to Jesus, and driven out humble saints by their arrogant and papistical decrees. Eternity alone can reveal the damage done to the body of Christ by the unscriptural and unscrupulous application of Romans 16:17. Sometimes an example is worth a thousand words. Let us consider one way by which such harm is accomplished.

A humble brother in the Lord prayerfully peruses the sacred oracles and in his study becomes convinced that the Son of God will return to the earth prior to the thousand years spoken of in the Apocalypse. He shares his views with the brethren with whom he meets and learns that others as sincere as himself do not reach the same conclusion. They continue to meet together around the common table with mutual respect and regard for one another. Then a preacher comes into the community and learns that the brother has arrived at a premillennial interpretation which seems to him to best explain what the scriptures express concerning the return of the Lord. The preacher visits him with a view to “setting him straight on what the Bible teaches,” but

finds that the other insists upon being his own interpreter and refuses to abdicate his right to search the scriptures for himself.

The preacher then begins a series of lectures on “The Millennium” in which he has free rein to express his understanding of the subject without opposition. The other brother must merely sit and listen in silence. He cannot appear before the same audience and express his views. After having set forth his interpretation for several months from the pulpit and on his weekly radio program, the preacher informs the congregation that they have learned from him that the premillennial interpretation is not from God, and it is “time to take a stand for the truth.”

He gleans occasional statements from individuals who have espoused the premillennial view, lifts them out of context and applies them to all who believe that Jesus will return before the thousand years. When the brother whom he opposes denies certain extremes he declares that all who adopt the premillennial view are cut from the same pattern and tarred with the same brush. He implies that all of these think more of their premillennial view than of anything else and have more in common with “denominational premillennialists” than they do with “the Lord’s church.” He insists that one cannot be in the latter and disagree with the orthodox position on the millennial reign.

The trap is now set. The trigger is baited for “scandalizing” the body of Christ and destroying a brother for whom Christ died. But how can this brother be “set at nought”? The preacher informs the congregation that “the loyal churches” will cut them off if they “fellowship premillennialists.” He declares that if they do not “put away such wicked persons” the time will come when they cannot even get a “faithful preacher” to conduct a funeral service for their dead. He calls for the congregation to “line up with the faithful brotherhood.” Then Romans 16:17 is used as the stick with which to throw the trap. “Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned and avoid them.” Now a humble brother whose only sin is that of thinking for himself is hounded out along with those who refuse to bow their knees to despotism, and who regard no one as high priest except Christ Jesus.

Does someone insist that this description is exaggerated? I deny it! The truth is I am describing actual cases of which I have been aware. Who caused the offence, that is, baited the trap? Is it a crime for one to study the word of God for himself? Is it a crime to reach a conclusion from such a study? Is it a crime to retain a conviction until one is personally convinced that he is in error?

Who was at fault when the hierarchy demanded that Galileo, under threat of torture, retract his theory that the earth revolved around the sun? Was the position which obtained at that time — that no person had a right to hold an opinion without consent of the church — a correct one? Is that position correct now? I charge without hesitancy that those who make of the church a mere party to uphold any millennial position as a test of fellowship are the ones who cause division.

A man may be in Christ and know nothing about the millennium. One can be in Christ and be mistaken about the millennium. He can be in Christ and interpret the scriptures from an amillennial or premillennial viewpoint. This does not mean both views are correct. It merely argues that being in Christ Jesus is not contingent upon either view. One is not in Christ because he is right about the millennium, but because he

acknowledges Jesus as Lord over his life. It is absurd and asinine for people who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ to fall out over how and when he will come again. This is an event over which neither group can exercise control. It will occur in God's time and manner regardless of our ideas about it.

To form parties around our interpretation of unfulfilled prophecy and set at nought our brethren is sinful, scandalous and sensual. It shows we are babes in Christ, that we are yet carnal and walk as men. It reveals we are still partaking of the works of the flesh. We are stupid and short-sighted when we allow men to use us as partisan pawns about such matters and herd us into factional alignments.

### **My Position**

The doctrine I have learned is that division in the family of God is contrary to the will of God. My Father does not want His children shivered into splinter groups or warring tribes. He loves all of His children as I love both of mine. For that reason I positively refuse to allow any man or group to put a party brand upon me which will separate or segregate me from any of my brethren. I shall keep an eye upon those who try to enlist me in their exclusive little segments and avoid them. I will keep out of their way when they try to get me to be a front man for their little cliques and clans.

I belong to Jesus Christ. He bought me with his blood and I do not intend to sell out to anyone else for anything less. No one can make me believe that I can best love God by mistreating His other children. The ones I shall mark and avoid are those who try to get me to mark and avoid all others outside of their little coteries and circles. I know they are factional and divisive. Their very attitude is contrary to all that Jesus came to accomplish.

It is true that I have learned a lot of other things which commend themselves to me as the doctrine of Christ but I do not intend to defend or denounce them. Having learned that doctrine that division is a sin, I shall mark and avoid all who create schisms and offences contrary to this doctrine. No man can be sound and sectarian at the same time. My aim is to save souls and lead men to Christ. It is not to increase or enlarge any party or faction as such. It is enough with me if the Lord adds men to the one body without me trying to entice them into some party or faction. I intend to stand fast in the freedom wherewith Christ set me free. And I shall defend for others the same freedom I demand for myself! I am not for sale!

I am sometimes asked if this will not create some problems for others in their attitude toward me. It will for those who are not free. Any free man in Christ is a problem for those who are factious. Every faction has to corral and brand all others and one who does not wear a party label of any kind presents a serious problem. The problem is not created by my freedom but by their factionalism. Let them become free and the problem will be solved. Let them tear down their corral fences and remove their artificial barriers and keep an eye on those who would build them up again and remain aloof from them and all of us can be happy in Jesus and with each other.

In the past, instead of marking those who are divisive, it was generally those who were divisive who did the marking, accompanying it with such cutting and slashing as rendered the body a spectacle of shame and disgrace to an unbelieving world. It is time



to stop this form of insanity which makes us bite and devour the body of which we are a part. Jesus died to make Christians — not cannibals!

The apostle describes the characters to be marked and avoided. “Such creatures are no servants of Christ our Lord, they are slaves of base desires; with their plausible and pious talk they beguile the hearts of unsuspecting people” (verse 18). Have we become so hardened against our brethren for whom Christ died that we regard those who differ with us about some point of trivia as “no servants of Jesus Christ our Lord but slaves of their base desires”? Are we so callous that we will thus brand God’s children who honestly disagree with us about some method of propagating the gospel or caring for orphans and other needy? Are we so benumbed in spirit and frigid of heart that we conclude that every brother and sister who expects Jesus to come in advance of the millennium is “no servant of Jesus Christ our Lord”? Are we mere robots of steel, case-hardened and unfeeling, so that we can drive out from our midst every saint who testifies to a life-changing experience with the Holy Spirit?

If these do not fall into such a category as Paul describes, why do we twist and wrest this scripture as applicable to them? Have we been chloroformed by our own orthodoxy and paralyzed by partisan prejudice until we cannot see that to employ this passage to project division makes of us the aggressors and the ones to be marked and avoided? Why do factional promoters quote this verse and apply it to others? Is this the way to add brotherly kindness to godliness and love to brotherly kindness? Is this how we fulfill the admonition to speak not evil one of another? Is this the way to eliminate envying and strife and to overcome confusion and every evil work?

I know not what course others may take, but as for myself I have resolved never again to be brought into serfdom to any man or made the slave of any machine. I shall steadfastly refuse to be made a cat’s paw for any clan or a carrier pigeon for any party. I will be answerable to God for my thoughts and actions and will allow no one to control my thinking *down here* who cannot assume responsibility for it *up there*. If I must answer for it in heaven I shall reserve the right to do it for myself on earth. I can best face the head of the one body by cherishing and nourishing every other member attached unto him. I can best serve the Shepherd by associating with all of the sheep rather than by foraging with a few of them in the arrogance of isolation from the flock.

I shall value a brother in Christ Jesus more highly than I value what he thinks, knowing that the blood of Jesus makes him priceless even while his thoughts are imperfect. All of the brothers I have are “brothers in error.” There are no other kind. Those who think they are not are in the worst error of all. But if they were good enough for God to accept they are not too bad for me to acknowledge. They can be my brothers on the same basis they are His children, and I will not stigmatize them as causing division when they are simply victims of it like the rest of us.

I am moved to conclude this chapter with a lengthy quotation from another source. It is my hope that you will not be deterred from reading it in its completeness despite its extended form. I have drawn it verbatim from *The Early Days of Christianity*, a volume of over 650 pages, written by Frederic W. Farrar, and published in 1884. In addition to being Chaplain in Ordinary to Queen Victoria, the author was also a Fellow of Trinity

College, Cambridge; and Archdeacon and Canon of Westminster. The book was dedicated to Robert Browning, the poet, who was an esteemed friend of the author.

But unity does not exclude diversity — nay, more, without diversity there can be no true and perfect unity. Where there is no unity there is distraction, but where there is no diversity there is death. Where the spirits of the prophets are not subject to the prophets — where every man is conscious only of his own invisible consecration — where, as in the Church of Corinth, every one in his fanatical egotism is anxious to shout down the truths revealed to others, that he may absorb the attention of all by his own “tongue,” however barbarous, however dissonant, however unintelligible — where it is ignored that amid the diversities of gifts and ministrations there is yet the translucent energy of one and the same Spirit — *there* is confusion, and railing, and irreligious strife.

And where, on the other hand, all lips mechanically repeat the same shibboleth for centuries after its significance has been worn away — where the dullness of a self-styled “orthodoxy” has obliterated the many hues of the wisdom of God — where enquiry is crushed under the heel of authority — where, in fact, there can be *no* independent enquiry because all conclusions are dictated beforehand by the tyranny of an usurped infallibility — *there* is uniformity indeed, but therewith corruption and decay.

When it is persecution to alter the perspective of a doctrine, and death to leave the cart-rut of a system — when they who question the misinterpretations of Scripture which have been pressed into the service of popular errors must face the anger of startled ignorance — when there is no life left to save the spark which glows in the ashes of the Martyr, or the lamp which flickers in the Reformer’s cell — then the caste which has seized the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven may boast indeed of unity, but it is the unity produced by selfishness in the few, and serfdom in the many. The unity so secured is but the stagnancy of the unrippled water, the monotony of the barren sands. It is the unity of the dead plain, “where every molehill is a mountain, and every thistle a forest tree.”

In this latter condition there is a deadlier peril than in the former. Even discords can be inwrought into the vast sequences of some mighty harmony, but what great music can be achieved with but a single note? Unbroken unanimity may be the boast of a deadening Buddhism, a withered Confucianism, a mechanical Islam; it cannot exist in a free and living Christianity. If it exists at all, it can only be as a uniformity of indifference and ignorance — a uniformity of winter and of night. The uniformity of the noonday is only for the Infinite. For finite beings, if there be any light at all, there must be the colors of the sunset, and the sevenfold luster of the rainbow, which is only seen when there is rain as well as sun.

## Chapter 7

### **WITHDRAW YOURSELVES**

The expression “withdraw fellowship” is not found in the sacred scriptures. This ought to give pause to those who claim to “speak where the Bible speaks, and remain silent where the Bible is silent.” The word “fellowship” is our inadequate English translation of *koinonia*, a Greek term which means “to share a common life.” The life which we share in common is eternal life. It dwells with the Father and was made visible to the apostles. One of them wrote, “What we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you and we together may share in a common life, that life which we share with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3. NEB).

No man or group of men can receive one into this fellowship. No man or group of men can withdraw it. The fellowship can neither be extended nor withdrawn by any being in the flesh. It can only be shared. Men cannot dispense eternal life, nor can they deny it. We are called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ by the Father Himself, and His fidelity is at stake in the call (1 Cor. 1:9). *The New English Version* aptly renders this, “It is God himself who called you to share in the life of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and God keeps faith.”

In spite of this legalistic sects in our day continually engage in what they call “withdrawal of fellowship,” and indulge in the heady notion that when they exclude an honest dissenter from their number the recording angel in heaven immediately expunges his name from the Lamb’s book of life. Those who regard the love letters indicted by the apostles as a written code, transform themselves into God’s executive board and law enforcement agency, and exercise the power of banishment, without realizing that their petty tyrannical action is given no recognition in heaven, except as a mark against them for such unloving and unbrotherly action.

Every sect is built upon fear, and fear breeds unwholesome attitudes. It promotes suspicion of any new concept and becomes agitated when confronted with dissent. It is an easily provable fact that it was the Roman hierarchy which took the word “heresy” and injected into it the idea that it consists of holding or expressing any view contrary to the orthodox, or official view of the church. The word “heresy” thus became a club to batter and bludgeon into unwilling compliance every original thinker. And the chief threat was excommunication, a word meaning, “out of the fellowship.” Rome was the first legalistic sect, and the mother of all sects, and the spirit which she breathed gave life to other legalistic parties, even to those which challenged her claim to primacy.

Any religious group on earth which makes any opinion honestly held as a deduction gleaned from personal study of the sacred scriptures, a test of fellowship or a condition of union or communion, is suckling from the paps of “the hoary mother on the Tiber.” Any group which excludes from its number a humble and non-factious brother simply because he differs in his thinking with “the official norm” is practicing on a minor scale the tactics of the Inquisition, and takes its place beside the persecutors of all ages.

Of course, those who make sincere dissent the ground for excommunication do not realize they are enforcing an unwritten creed, as damaging and destructive as all creeds

invented to secure uniformity. Actually they assume they are being faithful to the word of God. But whatever a man must believe to be received and recognized by any group is the creed of that group. Few factional groups realize that they search the scriptures to find some "heavenly" validation for their presuppositions, attitudes and actions, yet this is the accepted procedure of all sectarianism. In the case now under discussion, men with the sectarian spirit lifted an expression from its setting and wove around it an elaborate tissue of traditional dogma which had no relationship to its apostolic significance.

The instruction of Paul, as given in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, by the translators appointed by King James reads thus: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye received of us." This is a statement appearing in a context, and if fairly interpreted must be interpreted within that context. To better understand how it has been abused let me specify a few things the context does not sanction or teach.

It does not teach "withdrawal of fellowship" by a congregation. It has nothing to do with a public corporate action. It says nothing about writing out charges and demanding a public acknowledgment of guilt. It is not even related to a mistaken view of some scriptural teaching or a deduction from the sacred oracles which may be wrong. In fact, the context gives to the term "disorderly" a specific application, and it has to do with daily conduct and behavior. It is not remotely related to an idea about scripture, whether right or wrong.

The problem is the age-old one of reading back into the apostolic letters modern ideas to justify our present practices. The remedy is to ignore what we "want to prove" and inaugurate an investigation of the conditions which called forth the letter. What situation at Thessalonica demanded correction and prompted the recommendation of the apostle? What did he actually say? What did he mean by what he said? What action did he expect the saints to take? It sounds well and good to raise these questions but it will not be easy to accomplish our purpose in asking them because men are reluctant to admit they have been wrong. Even when forced to admit their application was unjustified they still want to salvage from it some crumb of comfort and save face.

The sincere student who seeks only truth will simply confess that he misunderstood a passage and was wrong about it. It will make no difference how long he taught his mistaken view or how many he influenced to accept it. I have absolutely no hesitancy in stating that I was in error on 2 Thessalonians 3:6 most of my past life. I used it as a basis for driving out from us men and women whose only "sin" was daring to think out loud. Many of the things they said then I accept now. They were ahead of me in many particulars. Unfortunately, I had "zeal, but not according to knowledge." I was wrong in spite of my sincerity. Let me share with you the things I learned which forced me to change.

## Background Material

Thessalonica was a city of pride. Location, history and status all contributed to the feeling of self-gratification among the citizens. But some of it was false pride. It was empty and vacuous.

The hot springs gushing from the earth in numerous places gave the city its original name of Therma. The rivulets from these, emptying into the sea, came in contact with the colder water and created a cloud of vapor through which sailing ships appeared as argosies of the skies. It was for this reason the body of water was designated "the Thermaic Gulf." The harbor bustled with the activity created by vessels of lading from many ports.

It was Cassander who changed the name of the city. The son of Antipater he married the daughter of Philip of Macedon. The latter had won a great victory on the very day that a runner brought him news of the birth of a baby girl. He returned word that she was to be called Thessalonica. After she married Cassander, he was assigned the task of slum clearance and modernization in the city which had not carted away the rubble of preceding wars. Not only did he alter the city, but changed its name to that of his wife. In honor of her he issued new coinage on which the form of "Victory" was imprinted. It was no dishonor for a city to bear the name of the sister of Alexander the Great.

In our own United States of America, Highway 66 (now Interstate 44) was long recognized as the chief arterial thoroughfare from coast to coast. Chambers of Commerce advertised their cities along this route with the slogan, "On the Main Street of America." There is some evidence that publicity groups for various municipalities functioned even in apostolic days. If so, the advertisers in Thessalonica could have adopted the phrase, "On the Main Street of the Empire." The famous *Via Egnatia*, the main artery through which life flowed from the heart of Rome to the remote extremities of the Asian world, passed directly through the center of Thessalonica. It was the largest and most influential city from Dyrrhachium to the Hellespont. Every pulse beat of the empire was felt as it surged through the political and economic veins of the district.

Most important is the fact that Thessalonica was a "free city." This cherished status was granted to but few places in the Greek world. Sometimes it was bestowed as a political gesture because of an illustrious past, as in the case of Athens. Again it was given as a reward for assistance to the armed forces of the empire in a period of crucial struggle, as in the case of Tarsus. This was true also of Thessalonica. After the assassination of Julius Caesar by the republican conspirators, a civil war began which culminated on the plains of the River Strymon, between Philippi and Thessalonica. These plains have been called "The Deathbed of the Roman Republic." Here the imperial forces led by Augustus and Mark Antony completely overwhelmed the army led by Brutus and Cassius.

As a result, Philippi was made a military colony (*colonia*) and Thessalonica a free city (*urbs libera*). There were four distinct privileges accorded a free city. (1) The citizens were self-governing and not subject to a district administrator appointed by Rome. They could determine their own form of government and were wholly responsible for its application. The local magistrates held the power of life and death over the citizenry,

but were responsible for any outbreaks of violence. (2) No armed Roman guard was stationed in a free city and the citizens were not subjected to the sight of an occupational force. (3) No Roman insignia, either political or militaristic, could be displayed. This avoided the frequent revolts which occurred elsewhere when the hated symbols violated places held sacred by the populace. (4) In most cases freedom from taxation (*libertas cum immunitate*) was granted, and direct descendants of original families, as well as retired soldiers, were supported by the dole if they registered and requested it.

If time and space permitted it would be a genuine privilege to show our readers how this background is woven into the very language in Acts describing Paul's encounter in the city, and how it also provides an understanding of many of the very phrases appearing in his two epistles to the Thessalonians. However, we must forego the pleasure to be derived from such a course in the interest of a more limited pursuit. We shall begin by investigating the general effect upon the inhabitants of a city of the declaration of *urbs libera*.

Obviously the decree would eliminate a great deal of personal responsibility and provide much time for leisure. In a cultural environment like the one at Athens this afforded the average citizen opportunity for listening to the various philosophers, most of whom conducted their dialogues in the Forum, or marketplace. At Thessalonica, devoid as it was of such scholastic opportunities, the tendency was for many of the men to degenerate into lazy and irresponsible louts and loungers, ready for any excitement which might be aroused to offset the monotony. This type of character is depicted in the references we have seen to the Thessalonians in the literature of the times, and the rabble might well be described in the words of Epimenides concerning the Cretans — "liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons" (Cp. Titus 1:12). This will explain what happened in Thessalonica as described by Luke.

But the Jews, in a fury of jealousy, got hold of some of the unprincipled loungers in the marketplace, gathered a crowd together, and set the city in an uproar. Then they attacked Jason's house in an attempt to bring Paul and Silas out before the people. When they could not find them they hustled Jason and some of the brothers before the civil authorities, shouting, "These are the men who have turned the world upside down and have now come here, and Jason has taken them into his house. What is more, all these men act against the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king called Jesus!" By these words the Jews succeeded in alarming both the people and the authorities, and they only released Jason and others after binding them over to keep the peace.

A congregation of saints exists within an environment and cannot be wholly disaffected by it. Those who compose it are also victims of their own past conditioning. This will serve to explain why Paul laid such emphasis upon the necessity of securing honest employment, holding it, and earning one's own livelihood. He did this in three ways.

1. By personal command while with the brethren. In his first epistle he directs them to "look after your own business, and to work with your hands, *as we commanded you*" (4:11). In his second epistle, he says, "For even during our stay with you we laid down the rule: the man who will not work shall not eat" (3:10).

2. By personal example in their midst. “Remember, brothers, how we toiled and drudged. We worked for a living night and day, rather than be a burden to anyone, while we proclaimed before you the good news of God” (2 Thess. 1:9). “You know yourselves how you ought to copy our example. We were no idlers among you; we did not accept board and lodging from anyone without paying for it; we toiled and drudged, we worked for a living night and day, rather than be a burden to any of you — not because we have not the right to maintenance, but to set an example for you to imitate” (2 Thess. 2:7-9).

3. By special admonition in both epistles. “Let it be your ambition to keep calm and look after your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we ordered you, so that you may command the respect of those outside your own number, and at the same time may never be in want” (1 Thess. 4:11,12).

These letters grew out of life situations. They were written to cover actual conditions. The favors for which they express thanks were real. The behavior which was commanded was genuine. The rebukes administered were not for imaginary wrongs. The corrections prescribed were not for fictitious ills. We can visualize the state of the brethren from that which was written to and about them. This fact lays a foundation of a scripture which has been wrested and contorted — 2 Thessalonians 3:6.

*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye received of us.*

On the basis of this passage honest dissenters have been hounded out of every faction and sect. Every disagreement with “the powers that be” and with those “who appear to be somewhat” has been labeled a disorderly walk and action has been taken to “withdraw fellowship.” In my own days of factional adherence and bigotry, I misused the passage as justification for refusal to recognize many of my brethren in the Lord Jesus. I was wrong! I am ashamed of the spirit of intolerance which I sought to excuse by this verse. I am also ashamed of the ignorance which prompted that spirit. I am convinced from unbiased research that what is commonly called “withdrawal of fellowship” is not countenanced in the verse and corporate action resulting in excommunication of a brother is not even a consideration in it.

The problem of interpretation centers around the meaning of “walking disorderly.” The word for disorderly is *ataktos*. It occurs in the form of an adverb twice (2 Thess. 3:6,11). It occurs in the verb form *ataktein* once (verse 7). When applied to the military it means “to break rank, to get out of step.” When applied to another orderly arrangement such as a school or business, it means “to play truant.” It has to do with a slack and irresponsible attitude. Dr. Barclay mentions its use in the papyri, “in an apprentice’s contract in which the father agrees that his son must make good any days on which he absents himself from duty or plays truant.”

The context clearly shows that Paul used it to designate the idleness into which the brethren had drifted, or lapsed. Having reached the mistaken view that the return of Christ was imminent, they saw no further need for working. They gave up their jobs and decided to live off the other brethren, even prying into their personal affairs and becoming busybodies in other men’s matters. Paul defines “disorderly” by showing both

what it is and what it is not. In verse 11 he shows that it consists of “working not at all.” In verses 7, 8, he demonstrates that he did not behave disorderly because he did not eat any man’s food without paying for it, but supported himself by secular labor engaged in by day and by night.

To walk disorderly, in this context, is to live in idleness and sponge off of the other brethren. To read anything else into it is to ignore the setting entirely and twist the scriptures capriciously and arbitrarily to fit a preconceived idea or notion. But what should be done to a person who simply will not get or keep a job and earn his own bread? The teaching is plain.

1. The brethren are commanded in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to “Withdraw yourselves from every brother who walketh disorderly,” that is, who falls into idle habits. The *Revised Standard Version* renders it, “Keep away from any brother who is living in idleness.” *Today’s English Version* says, “Keep away from all brothers who are living a lazy life.” *The Authentic Version* reads, “Shun every brother who behaves as a shirker.” *Barclay* translates, “Keep yourselves from every brother who behaves like a truant.” *The New English Bible* has it, “Hold aloof from every Christian brother who falls into idle habits.”

There is not the slightest intimation of congregational or corporate action. It has no relationship to public or formal discipline. It is individual. No action is taken on the idle person. Nothing is done to him. He is simply left where he is while the brethren step back from him. To “withdraw yourselves” means to step back, to retreat, or to retire from the scene. Observe that the one from whom the brethren are to step back or hold themselves aloof is a *brother*, although a lazy one who is living in idleness. Paul twice refers to the lazy individual as a brother.

“Withdraw” is from *stello* which means “to gather up.” It was used for gathering up and binding one’s loose outer garment to keep it from coming in contact with that which would soil or contaminate it. It was used for furling the sails of a ship to keep them from striking together and suffering damage. It is the term which would apply when a mother called her children into the house to protect them from threatened danger. It is easy to see how it came to mean, “to avoid, to hold aloof.”

The brethren in Thessalonica were simply commanded to refrain from extending hospitality to loafers and slackers. They were not to feed them for the command was that “if any would not work neither should he eat” (verse 10). If one of these dawdling drones appeared at the front door just before mealtime he was to be offered a job instead of food. If he refused the former he was to be refused the latter. One who shunned honest toll was to be gently shunted from the table. It was just that simple.

2. The idle busybodies were commanded and exhorted to get a job. “That with quietness they work and eat their own bread.” The term “busybody” is especially interesting since it is a play upon words. In the original it incorporates the word for “work.” In verse 11 Paul uses the verb *ergazomai*, to work, and follows it with *periergazomai*, busy-bodies. Those who neglected their own work, which should have been central in their own lives were flitting and buzzing around telling others how to conduct their business. The prefix *peri* means “around” as in periscope or periphery.



W. E. Vine says a free rendering of the passage would be, “Some who are not busied in their own business, but are overbusied in that of others.”

“Quietness” is from *hesuchia*. It implies that tranquility which arises from within and causes no disturbance of others. The Greeks had a different word for that serenity which proceeds from without but it would not have been as appropriate here. The idle brother was to secure a job and earn his own keep, without creating problems and complications for others in the congregation.

3. “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed” (verse 14). “Note” is from *semeioo*, of which W. E. Vine says, “In the Middle Voice, to note for oneself and is so used in 2 Thess. 3:14, in an injunction to take cautionary note of one who refuses obedience to the Apostolic word by the Epistle.” In the commentary in which Vine teams up with C. F. Hogg, there occurs this interesting observation, “continuous tense, suggesting that no hasty conclusion was to be drawn from an act, but that the course and general conduct was to be observed.”

The phrase “have no company with him” is intended to forbid the extending of hospitality. It would preclude invitations to social gatherings to which the idle might flock and at which they would eat at the expense of others. The word ashamed is from *entrepo*, and refers to a “wholesome shame which involves a change of attitude and conduct.”

4. Although the offender is to be noted and hospitality refused while he persists in idleness, the record says, “Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” Refusal to furnish food for such a person does not mean he is to be treated as a heathen. He is simply a lazy and indolent brother, who must be shunned to save him from his course. When a man cannot be reached through appeal to his heart he may have to be reached through appeal to his stomach. So long as his head is empty and his stomach is full little can be done.

It is almost impossible to imagine how the tangled maze of disciplinary action — boycott, excommunication, accusation, and congregational exclusivism — has grown out of this passage. We can only conclude that when men seek for justification for their sectarian attitudes they will find it. “Withdraw yourselves” provided the handy passage to satisfy their partisan needs because it contained the word “withdraw” and they swooped down and appropriated it as a new weapon in the arsenal of factionalism.

It would be humorous, were it not so serious, that the passage has been used to exclude people for almost every thought that has been expressed, but has never been used to deal with the problem which the apostle had in mind. I have never known of anyone being hailed before the congregation on the charge of laziness. Perhaps it is recognized that, in some places, if idle habits were made a test of fellowship, there might not be enough persons remaining to even have meetings. Again, it has to be remembered that it may be that in most places the membership is too lazy to bring an accusation of laziness.

I suspect the King James Version is partially responsible for our condition and if some of the other versions had been used the brethren might have been saved the

embarrassment of confessing their mistaken application. I suggest that those who are really concerned read the third chapter of the Second Thessalonian letter in *The New English New Testament*.

## Chapter 8

### **WALKING IN THE LIGHT**

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:7).*

No discussion of fellowship can ignore this statement. It is apparent that the fellowship mentioned is conditioned upon “walking in the light” and doing so to the extent that God is in the light. But what is the light? What is darkness? What is it to “walk in the light”? An objective analysis of this passage and a proper answer to these questions produces a real surprise to partisan defenders who have merely accepted a traditional explanation without study or investigation.

It is not my intention at present to outline at length the background of this epistle. That belongs more appropriately to the next chapter and my discussion of the implications of 2 John 10, 11. It will suffice now to say that at the time of this writing, the last survivor of the apostles was living in Ephesus. Here he came into direct contact with the sect of the Gnostics who had infiltrated and disturbed every congregation in the Greek world. These philosophic cultists pretended to special insights and claimed to have knowledge of the mystical and elemental structure of the universe. They took their title from *gnosis*, knowledge. They were the “knowing ones,” those on the inside, as opposed to the uninitiated.

Although there were various schools of gnostic thought, all were basically agreed upon the idea underlying their synthetic philosophy, that all matter is essentially evil. On this basis they concluded that God could not have personally and directly created the world because He could have no contact or relationship with evil. By the same token they concluded that Jesus was either a phantom, or that he was born of a union of Joseph and Mary and elevated to Sonship with God at his baptism by John. Under the leadership of Cerinthus and other advocates of that day, this philosophy wormed its way into every congregation in Asia Minor. Wherever it went it destroyed the faith of many in the fact that Jesus had come in the flesh.

Prevalent in the theory was the idea that there could be no possible union between the human and the divine. The former was material, and therefore, evil; and the possibility of fellowship between them was regarded as absurd and ridiculous. God was so far outside of and above the universe which had been created by a demiurge, one of a series of emanations which had gone out from the divine essence, that He was wholly unconcerned about anything on earth and completely without interest in mankind. There could be no direct bridging of the chasm between deity and humanity, and from this stemmed two conclusions. Jesus was not deity manifested in a body of flesh and there was no such thing as a stage of fellowship between God and man. There was no *koinonia*, no sharing of a common life.

John counters this theory with his gospel record. This will account for the difference between it and the “synoptics.” This term is applied to Matthew, Mark and Luke, because their contents can be charted in parallel columns and synchronized. A synopsis can be made which will be true to all three. The gospel according to John

does not lend itself to such treatment. It was written for a distinctive purpose and to meet a wholly different need. The first two epistles of John were written for the same purpose. Both specifically deal with the treatment to be accorded to those who “deny that Jesus is the Christ” (1 John 2:22), that is, “that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh” (2 John 7).

An analysis of 1 John in the light of its background and the circumstances which called it forth, is one of the most rewarding experiences which can come to the dedicated Bible student. John begins by affirming that eternal life, which was with God from the beginning, was manifested and made visible unto men, and that he was one of the selected witnesses who beheld that life embodied in a person and could testify to it. “We have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life.” Since eternal life was with the Father from the beginning, and was not merely extension of time, but possessed the quality of personality, the pre-existence of the “Word of life” was thus asserted.

### **Nature of the Testimony**

The fact that prior to the manifestation, the Word was in a different state, does not argue against existence. It serves only to demonstrate that the incarnation revealed to human eyes what previously had been hidden from them. Once accepted, this would deal a blow to elemental gnosticism. But there was a group of gnostics called the Docetics, from *dokeo*, to appear, to seem. These alleged that Jesus possessed no reality, and that he was immaterial, and a phantom (or phantasy). For their benefit the apostle shows that the Word not only became flesh, but was actually subject to examination by the senses.

He argues against the possibility of the witnesses being deceived or deluded upon the basis of their intimate personal association with the embodied Word. From the standpoint of time, proximity, and conscious interest, they had ample opportunity to examine the validity of His claims. They were with Him long enough and were associated with Him closely enough that they could not be misled. Their own careers and very lives were staked upon His veracity. They had left all and followed Him.

Their examination of eternal life personified in the flesh was audible, visual and manual. “We have heard, we have seen with our eyes, we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life.” The best proof is visual, and this is stressed. Not only did they see Jesus with their eyes, but they looked upon him. This has to do with studied investigation or prolonged scrutiny. Theirs was no mere passing glance. They did not simply *look at* Jesus, but they *looked upon* him. They knew He was not a phantom. They touched Him and handled Him. The apostles were qualified witnesses. Their testimony met all of the requirements essential to proving a point of fact.

Their experience with the manifested Word made possible a fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Eternal life became incarnate in Jesus, and when Jesus took up his abode in them, eternal life became incarnate with them. “This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life” (1 John 5:11,12). When the Word of life became embodied, that Word was designated the Son of God. When eternal life dwells in us we are also called sons of

God. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (3:1).

The declaration of what the apostolic witnesses had seen and heard was to make possible the extension of the divine human fellowship unto their hearers and thus provide for them fullness of joy. The essence of the message which had been conveyed unto them by God, and which they, in turn, conveyed to others, was summed up in the words, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Since the declaration was to assure fellowship of the human with the divine, and since it consisted of the statement that God is light in the absolute, it is obvious that nothing can be of greater importance than identification of the light. Fellowship with God is conditioned upon walking in that light.

Fellowship is not by word but by walk. It is not the testimony of the lips but of the life. The word "walk" means more than merely making progress in a given direction, or of placing each foot alternately before the other. It involves experience and sharing of thought and life. "And Enoch walked with God, and he was not (found) for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation, and Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9). Inasmuch as God is light, to say that one is in fellowship with God while walking in darkness is to lie and do not the truth. Darkness is the opposite to light.

### Identifying the Light

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

What is the light? In this context the light is what God is, for God is light. The word "light" is used as a symbol for various qualities or things in the inspired scriptures. Sometimes it is used for divine revelation, and the unrevealed, the mysterious, is darkness. Sometimes it is used for reverence of the living God, and idolatry is darkness. More frequently it is used for knowledge, and ignorance is darkness. Only by studying the frame of reference in which the term is employed can one be certain of its meaning.

In this connection, we can eliminate from consideration anything which it is not possible for man to possess in the same degree as God, that is, in an absolute or perfect degree. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all ... If we walk in the light *as he is in the light.*" This immediately excludes knowledge of God's will from consideration. It is obvious that none of us can have the same degree of mental perception as God. The finite mind cannot embrace the scope of the infinite. To walk in the light cannot mean either to perfectly understand God's will or to perfectly do it. This would require something we do not have in the flesh.

Fortunately, we can determine from this brief epistle what light is, as John uses the word. *Light is love.* It is not, however, affection, sentiment or passion. The love of which John speaks is *agape*, the love which God had for us which prompted him to send Jesus to die for us in our unworthiness. It is that active and energetic good will which stops at nothing to achieve the good of the beloved object. It must be expressed. It can never be passive. It is apprehended in its demonstration which is always

outreaching and outgoing. “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us” (3:16). It is this in which we must walk. This is the light and Jesus was light embodied.

Light is love and since the opposite of light is darkness, the darkness must be hate. Once this is grasped every sentence in the epistle falls into place like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and a beautiful picture results. Let us proceed with the proof of our assertion. To abide in the light is to love the brethren. “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him” (2:10). If this is correct, hatred for the brethren will be darkness. “He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother is in darkness even until now” (2:9). This last is the equivalent of saying, “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie” (1:6). “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar” (4:20).

It may be urged that the completing phrase of verse 6 is “do not the truth.” This is correct for if we walk in darkness “we lie and do not the truth.” But it is by brotherly love that we know we are of the truth. “And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him” (3:19). To the Greeks, truth was the reality which was at the basis of all appearance. It was the ideal which was behind every semblance. It was the genuine. John is saying that those who are “in the truth” are obligated to walk according to it, and the reality behind God’s whole purpose is love. If we say that we share in the divine nature (have fellowship with God), and walk in darkness (hate our brethren), we lie and do not the truth (miss the reality underlying the whole Christian structure).

### **Personification of Love**

On what premise can we conclude that John introduces the theme of love in conjunction with his affirmation that the Word of life was manifested in a visible person? The answer is simply that it was the love of God which made eternal life manifest unto us. Because he loved us thus, we ought also to love one another. “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). “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (3:16). “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (4:11).

The Son of God was God manifest in the flesh, reconciling the world unto himself. But that which was manifested was the Word of life which was with God in the beginning, and which was also God. But that light which was manifested was eternal life (1:2). It was this Word of life personalized which constituted the basis of the apostolic message. “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.” Eternal life is not extension of time but expression of love! Read the following carefully. “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light” (1:5). “For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (3:11). “This is the message God is light.” “This is the message ... that we should love.” There are not two messages. There is simply *the message*. It defines the nature of God and outlines the expression of that nature in those who are his sons.

And if it be true that light is love, it must follow that, if God is light, God is love. On this the record is positive. "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (4:16). "He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love" (4:8). To the serious student nothing else should be necessary to identify the light. When a writer says, "God is light," and in the very same letter twice explains what he means by saying, "God is love," it should require little intellectual ability to determine that in the context of that writer, *light is love*.

## Perfection of Love

We come now to the chief intellectual hurdle and the greatest challenge to the scholarly mind. If light is love, does this not imply that we must possess love in the absolute? Must we not have love in a perfect degree? Whatever light is, we must experience it, that is, walk in it to the same degree as it is manifested in God. "If we walk in the light as he is in the light." That this is absolute is proven by the statement that "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." If we walk in the light as he is in the light there can be none of the opposite effect in us.

We have already eliminated knowledge from consideration as the light because all of us are ignorant in some degree, of the will of God. No one knows as much as God. To assume that light is knowledge of God's will and that darkness is ignorance of it, is simply to make us liars. We would then have to read, "If we say that we have fellowship with him and are ignorant of any part of the divine will, we lie and do not the truth. But if our knowledge is absolute and perfect, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." No sane reasoner would want to hinge his hope of being cleansed from sin upon knowing as much as God knows.

But do we not face the same problem if we regard light as being love? Can we love as God loves? Can we walk in this light as God is in the light? I unhesitatingly affirm that we can. This was the very purpose of John's epistle. It was written to tell us why and how we must do so. The thing that disturbs many is that they regard love as something to be achieved rather than something to be experienced. But no one achieves light. It is a creation of God, a blessing to be bestowed and enjoyed. And that love which is equivalent to light is not something to be attained by human striving. It is a gift of God. It is a commitment unto us of the divine nature. "Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (4:7).

When the love of God was personalized in Jesus, God revealed the possibility of incarnating the divine nature. That nature had always existed but was never expressed before as it was in Christ. "In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9). In him the world could see love manifested. The nature possessed by God could now be incorporate in man, for true love was now available. "A new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth" (2:8). The true love was now reality in flesh.

The love that God requires He supplies. It is a fruit of the Spirit. It is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us of God (Romans 5:5). It did not originate with man but with God. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us" (1 John 4:10). "We love because he first loved us" (4:19). When God dwells

in us His love is perfected in us (4:12). “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love: and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world” (4:16, 17). Our love is made perfect! And as he is, so are we — and in this world!

This does not minimize our responsibility. It does not mean the human factor is eliminated. The provision of love is God’s part; the expression of it is our part. God never forces us to act contrary to our will. It is His will to make love ours, it is our will to love others, and to be like Him. This is proven by the fact that sometimes love is regarded as light which man cannot create, while at the same time man is commanded to walk in that light, that is, to exercise it in his own life. A man can love his brother or he can hate him. The manifestation of love is contingent upon the will of the individual, but one who is completely surrendered and committed to God will spontaneously and naturally walk in love. The secret is the surrender of the will absolutely to God so that the divine nature is incarnated in us as it was in Jesus. The Word must become flesh in us!

## **Loving Our Brothers**

God is light. God is love. One who walked in love walks in light. One who dwells in love dwells in God. God dwells in such a person, so he is in the light and the light is in him. “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (4:16). It is as we love our brothers that we walk in light and move out of darkness — the darkness of hate and animosity. Let us note the things affirmed of such love.

1. To love the brethren is to abide in the light (2:10). The word “abide” is not the word for a temporary dwelling. It is not used of transients who merely stay overnight. It is not a motel enroute, but home. The light is the fixed residence of those who love the brethren. They do not merely pass through the light on their way from one area of darkness to another.

2. Love for the brethren is one of the two distinctive marks of sonship with God. “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (3:1). “In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” (3:10).

3. Love for the brethren is a waymark to identify the area into which we have come as that of life. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (3:14). The expression used here has to do with crossing a frontier. It was used of those returning from an alien country to their native land. When one is able to love the brethren unreservedly, because they are brethren, and not upon other conditions, he can know that he has left the territory where death reigns. He no longer breathes the noxious fumes of hate, he is in a purer atmosphere. He does not wade through the murky swamps of animosity. His feet are on solid ground.

4. Love for the brethren is a criterion by which we can determine if we are of the truth. It is useless to contend we are of the truth when we do not love our brethren. We can memorize the scriptures and be able to quote whole chapters but this does not



demonstrate we are of the truth. “And hereby we know we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him” (3:19).

5. Love manifested toward brethren enables God to dwell in us, that is to be in fellowship with us. As we love, the divine love is perfected in us. We must love as God loved. His love was not conditioned upon our sinlessness, our perfection in knowledge, or our freedom from error. The love of God is different from all other forms of love. Love which is composed of sentiment, affection or emotion, is extended to those who are deemed worthy. The love of God creates the worth in itself. The first loves those who are precious, the others are precious because they are loved.

When we tolerate or endure those who disagree with us and love those who do not, we are no better than the despised and outcast publicans (Matt. 5:46). They loved those who reciprocated in kind. Theirs was the mutual sharing of misery. Our love is to be creative and outgoing. It expends itself because only in so doing can it live. In loving we see God in our own hearts. “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us” (4:12).

6. When we are partners in Brotherly Love, Unlimited, we are freed from all torment of fear. This is not true of those who are restrained and restricted by a legalistic concept of the Way. All who seek to live by law, or love by law, will spend their time on earth “bound in shallows and in miseries.” Who knows if he has learned all he could learn, done all he could do, or climbed as high as he could by exertion of his own power or ability? There will always be doubt and suspicion, fear and distrust, under such a system. God changed the world by turning love loose. When we do the same we lose all fear of men on earth and of judgment after death. The secret to the carefree life is love unbounded. “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment .... There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (4:17, 18). Notice that it is only perfect love that can cast out fear. Imperfect love is always frightened and fearful.

## **Hating Our Brothers**

In the context love is a positive, active, energetic and energizing force. It is creative. But hate is negative. Because of its nature love must express itself in positive fashion, but hate need not do so. It can be simply lack of love. Man was made with the ability to love and thus to be like God, who is love. When he fails in this respect he does not cross the frontier. One must do something to leave where he is but he need not do anything to stay where he is. Not to love is to hate! This thesis would be incomplete if we showed the nature of love without studying the nature and results of hate.

1. Hatred for brethren (that is, lack of love) leaves one in darkness. Regardless of how one may assert he is in the light, if he does not love, he lies. “He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now” (2:9). Darkness is simply absence of light. God did not create darkness. He created light.

2. Hatred of our brethren blinds us and makes true perception impossible. No man can ever grasp the import of God’s revelation until he loves his brethren as God loves them. To assert that one sees the truth while hating his brothers is like a blind man claiming to

view the beauties of nature. “But he that hateth his brother is in darkness and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes” (2:11).

3. Lack of love for the brethren is proof of the fatherhood of Satan in our lives. The realm of hatred is presided over by “the prince of the power of the air.” Those who operate in the area of hatred and animosity are on the devil’s territory. It is useless to affirm we are sons of God if we do not love God’s other sons. “In this the children of God are manifested and the children of the devil” (3:10).

4. Those who do not love the brethren are still in the domain of death. They dwell like lepers in putrid sepulchers, and like the evil spirits of old “abide in the tombs.” It is by love that we cross the frontier from death unto life. He who has not learned to love has not learned to live (3:14).

5. One who hates his brother is a murderer. Under the regime of Christ, thought and intent may be taken for the act. Jesus pointed out that those in olden times said, “Thou shalt not kill” but now to be angry against a brother without cause, or to slander or falsely accuse him, might result in losing one’s soul. One who hates lacks only the opportunity to do violence to a brother who is the object of his wrath and spite.

6. One who does not love does not know God. He may know about God and be able to catalogue the attributes of deity. But there is a difference in the ability to identify a person and in being identified with him. It is one thing to describe another; a wholly different thing to abide in Him. “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8).

### **The Fallacy of Orthodoxy**

It was my lot to grow up in a religious movement which had its inception in a sincere attempt to “unite the Christians in all of the sects.” It proposed to accomplish this by the very simple expedient of renouncing all formal creeds and ignoring the sects which they had spawned and returning to the original pattern as depicted in the apostolic writings. To assure success in restoring the ancient order the slogan was adopted, “We speak where the Bible speaks, and remain silent where the Bible is silent.”

Unfortunately for such historic efforts, the noble men who conceive them grow old and die, and are succeeded by others who retain the idea without the ideals or character. In order to preserve the gains that have been made, intellectual walls are erected, and soon the very spirit of freedom which gave rise to the effort is proscribed. The love letters of the apostles are converted into a law to be enforced, the movement itself becomes “the Lord’s church,” and the traditional legalistic interpretations become hallowed precepts, so that “the System” which evolves is confused with the will of God and “the scheme of redemption.”

In such a project fear makes all dissent heresy and regards every divergent opinion as a threat. One who thinks becomes a danger and must either be “brought into line” or driven out. Every scripture is commandeered to man the ramparts of orthodoxy and even though it may be wrested from the contextual soil in which it was planted by the Holy Spirit, it will be used as a bludgeon to ward off attacks upon “the System.” I have

no hesitancy in asserting this is exactly what has happened in connection with 1 John 1:7.

It cannot be denied that the average preacher of "The Church of Christ" regards the light of which John speaks as his own creedal interpretation of the new covenant scriptures! To "walk in the light" is to live up to the traditional factional explanation of the party of which he is a member. To "walk in darkness" is to deviate in some particular, especially that of the special party emphasis, from the unwritten creed. Each party thinks it alone is in the light and all of the others are in darkness. Since "fellowship one with another" is conditioned upon "walking in the light," and since the light is the legalistic code of the faction, fellowship is regarded as ordained of God to be limited to fellow-partisans.

It would be a matter of compassion if only the ignorant and the unlearned were victims of such philosophy, but it becomes tragic when it is realized that this type of exposition is advocated by editors and journalists who have a reputation in their parties. It is even advanced by college professors responsible for teaching the younger saints. The situation would be regrettable if such teaching was given without intent to unduly influence others; it is even more so when it is done with the deliberate design of maintaining division in the family of God, and keeping apart those who would recognize each other as brethren. When the humbler believers indicate a desire to exhibit love for those on the other side of a partisan wall they are discouraged by misapplication of the statement, "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." Actually the revised factional version should read, "If *they* will walk in our light as we are in that light, we will have fellowship with them."

The apostle John wrote in a time of crisis to stimulate believers in the Word of life and to encourage fellowship in love. His letter is a majestic treatise on brotherly love, unsurpassed in the whole realm of literature. In spite of this, men under guise of loyalty to Jesus single out a passage and interpret it in such a manner as to make fellowship impossible and to render every claim of the epistle upon our better selves null and void.

I deny that the light in this instance is a written code. God is light but He is not a written code. Not a letter that John wrote was either life or light. If the third epistle was either one, the apostle deliberately withheld life and light from the beloved Gaius, for he declared, "I had many things to write, but I will not with pen and ink write to thee." If the second epistle was to be life or light, it was imperfect, for John wrote. "Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink." That the first letter was not intended to convey life is evident. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (5:13). Eternal life is not having a copy of the Bible, but having the Son of God. "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life" (5:12).

Where is the congregation of believers which will brazenly affirm that it is composed only of those who know as much about God's will and purpose as God Himself? If the light in which we must walk to have fellowship, is knowledge of God's revelation, we must be either as perfect in knowledge as God or we cannot be in the fellowship. "If we walk in the light *as he is in the light*, we have fellowship one with another." God is light and in him is no darkness at all." If darkness is ignorance we cannot be ignorant of anything in the universe. We must know all there is to know, and be as wise as God, or

else we walk in darkness. If we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness — if we are ignorant about anything — we lie and do not the truth.

The absurdity of this lies in the fact that, on the basis of this philosophy, we will have to baptize people in the morning and exclude them from our number in the afternoon, for if they do not come to a perfect knowledge as soon as they are baptized they are walking in darkness. If the champions of orthodoxy say that we must allow them time to learn, then we ask how long they may walk in darkness and still be accepted? How much of the Bible must one be able to grasp perfectly before he is walking in darkness? How much of it can he misunderstand and still walk in the light?

It is time to quit playing around with such puerile proponents of partisan positions. Where is the preacher who quotes this passage to debar humble saints and discourage an expression of fellowship among brethren, who will dare to affirm that he is as wise as God and as good as God? If he dare not say that he is, by his own admission he is not in the fellowship. Like Haman, he is hanged on the fatal gallows which he constructed to destroy others. I consider the traditional orthodox interpretation placed upon 1 John 1:7 as one of the most dangerous ever palmed off on unsuspecting men and women. It is subversive of the Spirit and a scandal to the church of God. It dooms the body to disintegration and can only damn us all to destruction if we embrace it.

Let us recapture the valid meaning of this warped and wrested passage and use it to promote fellowship, and not pervert it. God is light. God is love. If we walk in the light we walk in God. If we walk in love we abide in God. If we love our brothers we abide in the light. You cannot separate light and love. Neither can you separate those who truly love one another. We quit living together when we quit loving each other. The road to togetherness is the path of love. "And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:21). When we heed this command, and only then, can it be said "As he is, so are we," and it can be added — in this world."

Let him who aspires to be like God begin by asserting his love for the brethren, all of them. Let him love those who agree with him, and let him love those who do not. Let him place love on a higher plane than that of mere reciprocity such as the pagans exhibit. He who shares love shares God, and he who shares God shares life. Certainly we should share ideas and concepts, but more than anything else, we should share the love that is light and life!

## Chapter 9

### **RECEIVE HIM NOT**

*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 partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 10, 11).*

This is one of the more prominent “twisted scriptures.” It has become the handle for every factional tool used to pry apart the living stones in the temple of God. It is the murderous knife employed to dismember the body of the Lord. It was written by the apostle of love to protect the flock of God from the prowling wolves who sought to seduce them through denial of the foundational fact that Jesus came in the flesh. It is now used to convert the sheep into snarling dogs, snapping at each other over every stray scrap of doctrine. It has substituted the law of the pack for the love of the flock.

No other passage so well illustrates the danger of ignoring the context. That the leaders of religious thought in some sects should have been betrayed into adopting an interpretation which makes unity impossible and renders ridiculous their vaunted claim to respect for the authority of the word of God, is one of the amazing developments in the restoration movement of which we are heirs. Any use of the written word which makes impossible the fulfillment and realization of the prayer and purpose of the Living Word is abuse and misuse. We can never regain our integrity as scholars until we repudiate the partisan explanation which makes every vagary of thought and dissent an occasion to destroy the fraternal relationship created by the blood of Jesus, and stab love dead at our feet.

What is “the doctrine” which is so transcendent that one who does not attest to it must not be allowed to enter the house, nor be given a greeting on the street or in the marketplace? Or, looking at it from the opposite position, what is it that, when advocated is so heinous and so poison to the fellowship, that to merely salute its opponent is to make one a participant in his vicious works? To this question a medley of things is contributed by factional voices. Every trivial idea which has been magnified out of all proportion to its value and worth is exalted to the status of the doctrine which is to preclude hospitality and make all greeting a violation of the Word of God. So ludicrous are some of these that it serves no good purpose to even mention them.

The depth of one’s love for the family of God can be determined by the relative value of those things which will cause one to sacrifice it or to break up the relationship. The triviality of those views elevated to a higher station than the family ties created by the blood of the cross is indicative of the shallowness and superficiality of thought eating like a pernicious cancer at the heart of a wonderful fellowship created by God and inaugurated by the indwelling Spirit.

Who can believe that the apostle who wrote more about brotherly love than any other man, would recommend that we refuse entrance to our homes to those saints who disagree with us over some of the things about which we debate? What sane reasoner can actually conclude that to greet a brother who disagrees with us about these matters is to become a participant in some “evil deed”? The very absurdity of such a conclusion

renders obnoxious the common usage of the passage by expositors who should know better.

I do not hesitate to say that so long as men maintain such an unrealistic attitude toward the sacred scriptures they can never make an impact upon the thinking world. They will only be purveyors of prejudice, agents of animosity, and disseminators of distrust. Such explanations are exercises in eisegetics, not exegetics. They inject a meaning into the holy oracles rather than extracting one from them. And while there was a time when dogmatism held men and women in line because the masses could neither read nor write, that day is over. We face another "Great Awakening" in the religious realm. Enlightened people are growing less satisfied with the dry husks thrown out to them by factional debaters.

To what did John refer by "this doctrine"? Who were the wandering teachers who were to be refused entrance when they applied for hospitality? What condition existed at the time which made it imperative that the "elect lady and her children" refrain from giving a greeting to certain teachers? Who were those who "went beyond" and did not remain in the doctrine of Christ? Surely what they denied must have been related to the very fundamental and essential facts upon which the faith was predicated to require such drastic measures to preserve it inviolate.

### **General Observations**

Every reputable scholar known to us believes that John was writing to counteract the pernicious effects of Gnosticism. Upon no other ground can we account for the approach of his gospel record and first two epistles. Who were the Gnostics? What did they teach? Why were they so dangerous to the Christian concept? How did John become involved in the controversy? It is not our purpose here to analyze this synthetic philosophy, interesting though it might be. We shall be content with supplying our readers with sufficient background material to enable them to see the purpose and intent of John and to recognize how modern "interpreters" among us have warped and wrested what the apostle wrote. For your own convenience and to aid the reviewers of what I write I will number the various observations.

1. The word "gnostic" is from *gnosis*, knowledge. The Gnostics were "the knowing ones." It was believed by the Gnostics that all matter was inherently evil and only spirit was good. Since the spirit was imprisoned in the body, and the body composed of matter, the chief aim was to free or liberate the spirit. Taking their cue from the Greek mystery religions they taught that only by probing the depths and ascending the heights of knowledge, could that which was real be delivered from the material. This required an elaborate secret ritual coupled with painful, arduous and disciplined investigation and research into the mystical infinite wisdom of God. All men were not equipped to do this, either from lack of time, inclination or ability, and the majority of these would continue on a more animal plane. The Gnostics were in a class by themselves. They were the initiated. They could "go beyond."
2. This idea of a spiritual aristocracy made up of specially endowed thinkers who were on "the inside" would wreak havoc upon the idea of fellowship. For this reason John emphasizes over and over that all saints have access to knowledge. They all possess

it. The word “know” appears in various forms eleven times in chapter two of the first epistle. “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye *know* all things” (2:20). “I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth but because ye *know it*” (2:21). The one who doesn’t know where he is going is the one who hates his brother (2:11). In chapter three “know” is found 8 times, in chapter four 7 times, and in chapter five 7 times. In every instance the disciples are comforted with the thought that knowledge is not the special privilege of the few. Note the recurrence of “we know” and “ye know.”

3. The Gnostics held that matter was evil. On this basis they speculated that God could not have created the earth because it was material. By the same token the idea of the incarnation was unthinkable. One group held that Jesus was simply an ethereal person, a mere phantom. They insisted he never had a real flesh and blood body, that he was pure spirit. These were called Docetics, from *dokeo*, to appear, to seem. John attacked this speculation by affirming that the apostles had heard, seen, scrutinized, and handled Jesus with their hands.

4. Cerinthus was the first Gnostic leader whose name has come down to us. He lived in Ephesus where John apparently wrote his epistles. According to Eusebius, the father of church historians, John knew Cerinthus for what he really was. Cerinthus made a distinction between Jesus and the Christ, or Logos. He taught that Jesus was human, the son of Joseph and Mary. But Jesus increased in wisdom and favor with God, which He could not have done if He had been God, according to Cerinthus. (See Luke 2:52). When Jesus was thirty years of age, He had lived in such a state of purity that God adopted Him, publicly announcing that Jesus was His Son in whom He was well pleased. Upon this occasion the Christ (anointing) descended upon Him in the shape of a dove. Cerinthus reasoned that Jesus could not have been God prior to this as He did not have the Spirit of God until it descended upon Him. The Christ came upon him at John’s baptism.

He further contended that the Christ (Spirit) could not be killed or made to suffer pain. The human Jesus was nailed to the cross and endured agony but the Christ had withdrawn as He came, and was beyond the reach of men. It is for this reason John insists that, “This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood” (1 John 5:6). It was not just Jesus who came to be baptized but Jesus Christ; it was not just Jesus who was crucified but Jesus Christ. He did not come by water (baptism) only, but by water and blood (crucifixion).

5. The crux of the whole matter as it affected Christian faith lay simply in the fact that a Gnostic could not believe in the incarnation. It was impossible for such a person to admit that the pre-existent Logos was made flesh. This provided a real test. If one, upon being asked, “Do you believe that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh?” answered in the affirmative, you could be sure he was motivated by the Spirit of God. If he denied or hedged, as the record says, “Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist” (1 John 4:1-3).

## Specific Observations

Having given this meager outline of Gnostic philosophy we turn to consideration of the cult of Gnostics against whom John sought to protect the saints. Let us list some of the things about them which we can learn from his writings.

1. We know that these men pretended to have access to a source of knowledge which made them superior in wisdom to the average member of the body. It was their aim to make the Way intellectually acceptable to the philosophic schools by expressing their concepts of Christ in the language of Oriental mysticism. They belonged to an arrogant group of Philosophic aristocrats who claimed to have the ability to *go beyond* and penetrate the veil of true learning. The idea that Jesus had come in the flesh was but spiritual pap for infantile mentalities but could not be countenanced by the advanced reasoner. John declared that the true *gnosis* was the apostolic testimony and the test of *knowledge* of God was willingness to receive that testimony. "We are of God; he that *knoweth* God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby *know* we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 John 4:6).

2. We know the Gnostics were respected and received by many and that they were numerous. They were regarded as possessing visionary insight and revelatory power because they were accepted as prophets. For this reason the apostle cautioned the saints to test the spirits "because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). John labels them antichrists, and says, "Even now there are many antichrists."

3. We know these men were traveling from place to place as did many of the philosophers and teachers in the Greek world and they no doubt depended upon the homes they contacted in each community to extend them hospitality. Any such home would then be used as a base for their efforts. It is significant that John says, "Many false prophets are *gone out into the world*." The false prophets were doing what Jesus commissioned the apostles to do.

4. We know that the Gnostics were separatists and schismatics and that they abandoned the body of saints to create a sect of their own. The unity of the body is based upon acknowledgement of the great fact that Jesus is the Christ. When men no longer are willing to accept this foundation upon which the community of heaven was planted they become antichrists. "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" (1 John 2:19). It is interesting that, in this context, John shows the one creed which can bind us together, repudiation of which will fragment us. "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son" (2:22). So long as one accepts fully the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, he remains upon the foundation upon which Jesus said he would construct his community. When he forsakes that foundation he forsakes all that is Christian.

5. We know that even though the Gnostics withdrew they still sought to influence those who allowed that which they had heard from the beginning to remain in them, and continued in the Son and in the Father (2:24). These false apostles were proselytizers. Under the guise of teaching advanced truth they wormed themselves into any home which would receive them, and led those who dwelt there to deny that Jesus was the



Christ. It was to warn against such teachers that John wrote, “These things have I written to you concerning them that seduce you” (2:26).

The reply of those who were solicited by these “advanced thinkers” was to be simply that they did not need any man to teach them, but having been anointed by the Holy Spirit they had access to all truth, and that truth was always consistent. The additional truth must be measured by what they had formerly been taught by the apostles. “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him” (3:27). Those who were taught by the Spirit would abide in Christ, that is, in what they had been taught by the anointing. The Gnostics “went beyond and abode not in the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9).

All history bears out the truth that during the lifetime of John, and in the very area where he resided and wrote, this synthetic philosophy was presented with ruthless disregard for the unity of the congregations. False prophets insinuated themselves into every company of the saints and promulgated their unhallowed speculations. It became necessary to issue blunt warnings to the saints against extending a welcome to such teachers, or allowing their homes to be used as bases from which to launch war on the elemental fact of the incarnation. This brings us to an analysis of the short epistle known as Second John. It contains the passage with which we are concerned in this article, a passage which has been twisted so that it can be used to stifle thought and stamp out all honest dissent with the partisan status quo.

### **The Second Epistle**

We shall not enter into the controversy as to identity of the addressee of this letter. It is my personal opinion that it was written to a Christian sister and her family. It is altogether possible, and appears even probable, that the congregation of saints met in her home. It will be observed how John speaks of truth and love in the same connection. He does not regard truth as being composed merely of facts which have been verified. Truth is a relationship which transcends human relationships. John loves the elect lady and her children in the truth (verse 1). All others who have known the truth exhibit the same love. The truth dwells in God’s children and is age-lasting (verse 2). The trinity of divine blessings — grace, mercy and peace — these are shared in truth and love (3). We walk in truth as required by God (4).

John approaches the primary purpose of his letter of admonition and warning with familiar language. Certain phrases are at once associated with certain writers. One of these phrases used by John is “a new commandment.” Every such phrase should be considered in the light of its other appearances. That which John wrote to the elect lady will be correctly understood only in conjunction with what he wrote elsewhere upon the same topic. We must never forget the gospel record and first epistle of John are *general*. They were written to meet a condition faced by the community of saints at large. The second epistle is *specific*. It deals with the same condition on a local basis and provides a specific approach to it. But the specific must always be understood in the light of the general. One is not qualified to diagnose and treat a specific cancer until he knows the nature of cancer in general.

1. John filled his gospel record and first two epistles with a dissertation on love (*agape*) but these were not written primarily to be treatises on love at all. They were produced to offset a dangerous philosophy which threatened dissolution of the community by destroying the foundation upon which it was built. Love is the antidote to such a condition because it cements and holds the hearts of the saints together in times of greatest stress. One who reads the writings of John about love will derive much pleasure from the observations of the apostle but he will never understand why John injected the teaching as he did until he remembers that love was a prescription for the body at a time when certain errors were becoming epidemic.

2. John besought the elect lady to remember that he wrote no new commandment. He simply reminded her of the commandment heard from the beginning. He identifies that commandment — *that we love one another* (5). Only if we recall constantly the nature of this commandment which was had from the beginning can we ever understand John properly. In 1 John 2:7, the brethren are told that John will write no new commandment unto them, but an old commandment which they had from the beginning. They are told that the old commandment is the *word* which they heard from the beginning.

*The word* is not the new covenant scriptures. They did not have this from the beginning. The new covenant scriptures grew out of needs created by later circumstances. Philemon was a letter of commendation for a runaway slave, Onesimus, who was returning to his master. Philippians was a letter of thanks for assistance to Paul when he was in prison. First Corinthians was written to deal with a demoralizing state of affairs disclosed by the visiting family of Chloe, and to answer queries in a letter brought by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus. All this came later. The word which was heard from the beginning was “Love one another.”

From the beginning Jesus said, “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Again, “These things I command you, that ye love one another” (15:17). John wrote to the elect lady, “This is love, that ye walk after his commandments” (2 John 6). Those who regard the Way as being a legalistic system lay great stress upon this, but they fail to grasp the significance of the following statement “This is his commandment, that, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.” The previous verse tells us that what we heard from the beginning was to love one another. This is the commandment of Christ. What John is here saying is, “This is love, that we walk after his commandments, and his commandment is that we love one another, and walk in love.” But why does John use “commandments” (plural) and “commandment” (singular) in the same sense? The answer is found in Romans 13:9 where we are told that all the commandments are summed up in one word, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” This lifts the commandments of Christ above the level of law to the plane of love. This is the word we had from the beginning.

3. The reason for the admonition to the lady and her children to walk in love is that, “Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (7). Here John pointedly identifies the kind of traveling false teachers against whom he warns the recipients of this epistle. This letter was written to counter the efforts of the Gnostics. “The many deceivers who have entered into the world” are “the many false prophets who are gone into the world” (1 John 4:1). The deceivers of whom he now writes are the seducers of whom he has

written. “These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you” (1 John 2:26). The things written identify the personages as antichrists (1 John 2:18). This first century apostolic letter was a pertinent and poignant warning against those who deny the teaching that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God.

### **The Fundamental Doctrine**

4. The elect lady and her children are cautioned, “Look to yourselves, that you may not lose what you (or we) have worked for, but may win a full reward” (verse 8). The purpose of the apostolic message was to build men in love or, the Christhood of Jesus, so that the eternal life they possessed by having the Son might eventually terminate in fullness of joy in His presence. Those who face up to the fact of His divine Sonship in the flesh will be rewarded with fellowship face to face in the future. If we abide in Him here we will abide in His presence over there. But if antichrists seduce us to forfeit our faith in the greatest fact in the universe we will lose all. So fundamental is this fact of faith that rejection of it is the elemental falsehood of this age. “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? (1 John 2:22). There is one foundation of salvation and one foundation of damnation. Both are directly concerned with the same fact. “He that believeth ... shall be saved he that believeth not shall be damned.” (I trust that no carping critic will conclude that I have intentionally devaluated baptism in making this point).

5. “Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.”

To whom does the apostle relate the expression, “Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ?” What is “the doctrine of Christ?” In order to have a better perspective let us notice some of the other translations.

Anyone who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God (*Revised Standard Version*).

No one who has God goes too far and fails to stay by the teaching of Christ (*Charles B. Williams*).

Whoever goes beyond, and does not remain within Christ’s teaching, will not possess God (*Authentic Version*).

Anyone who runs ahead too far, and does not stand by the doctrine of Christ, is without God (*New English Version*).

Anyone who is “advanced” and will not remain by the doctrine of Christ, does not possess God (*Moffatt*).

The man who is so “advanced” that he is not content with what Christ taught, has in fact no God (*J. B. Phillips*).

It will be noted that these substitute for “transgresseth” (King James Version) such expressions as: goes ahead, goes too far, goes beyond, runs ahead too far, and advanced. Both Moffatt and Phillips indicate by a usage of quotation marks that the term “advanced” is used in a special sense. Those who are under consideration are not really advanced thinkers; they just flatter themselves that they are. These later versions

are more nearly correct than the King James Version. The word “transgress” is a translation of *parabaino*, and it is true that this is found in a few manuscripts. But all of the rest have *proagon*, which means to go ahead, to advance beyond.

This was the very claim of the Gnostics. They looked with disdain and contempt upon “the common herd” who thought of Jesus as being the Word (*Logos*) made flesh. They regarded him as an incorporeal emanation from the Creator who led them into advanced thought which made them “the knowing ones.” In their intellectual arrogance they had advanced to the place where they could see that Jesus was not the Christ. Jesus was human. The Christ was spirit. These two were not the same. They did not deny that Jesus existed. They did not deny that the Christ existed. They did not deny that for a period the two had been invested in the same person. But they did deny that Jesus was the Christ or that the Christ was Jesus. Jesus was not the Word (*Logos*) and had no prior existence to the incarnation, as they viewed it. Therefore there was no incarnation, Jesus did not *come* in the flesh.

The apostolic declaration was that Jesus had come in the flesh. This was basic, elemental and fundamental. The spirit which confessed this was of God; the spirit that did not confess it was not of God, but was antichrist. This was the test proposed by which to “try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1-3). This was the foundation. One who was on that foundation might be mistaken about many things and all of them were, but there could be no mistake about the foundation. It is noteworthy that one was built upon this foundation by a positive action — confession that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (1 John 4:2). The opposite is not denial, which is also a positive action, but simply “not confessing.” “Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus is come in the flesh is not of God.” This eliminates not only positive denial, but also neutrality. One cannot occupy a neutral position as to the identity of Christ and be built upon the foundation. The foundational fact must be confessed — *as a fact!* One cannot be either a gnostic or an agnostic.

6. We can determine what the “doctrine of Christ” is in this sense by the effect of “going beyond” or “abiding in it.” One who *advances* has not God; one who “abides in it” has both the Father and the Son. The doctrine of Christ, in this case, does not consist of *the things* Jesus taught, but of *the thing* taught about Jesus. The ethical and moral values of Jesus are very important. Nothing we say here must be understood as minimizing their value. One must “keep the commandments of Jesus” (John 15:10), and if he loves Jesus he will keep them, naturally, automatically and spontaneously, for this is the only possible reaction of love. Only one who does not love Jesus will not keep His sayings (John 14:24). Yet we must all, without exception, place some qualification upon living up to the requirements of Jesus. “As far as we are able,” “to the extent we understand them,” “as we learn what he wishes,” — these are all our own qualifications and limitations to explain how we can have God, and how He can have us, while we fail to live up to His perfect example. We often transgress and often disobey. If we did not the Father would not need to administer chastisement. Yet we are told that all of us are partakers of such chastisement, and without this we would but demonstrate that we are bastards, and not sons.

But “the doctrine of Christ” about which John wrote cannot be qualified. It cannot be governed by mitigating circumstances. One who does not abide in it has not God. It is

just that plain. It is just that positive. What is the doctrine one absolutely must have in order to have God? Whatever it is, it was possessed by all who had God while the apostles were still alive. It was possessed by “the lady and her children” and by “all others who are in the truth.” It could not have been a copy of the new covenant scriptures, for no person on earth possessed that, not even the apostle John. It could not have included the Second Epistle of John for those to whom it was written were already “walking in truth” before John wrote it. This epistle could not have been a part of “the doctrine of Christ” under consideration, for there were those who had already gone beyond that doctrine when this epistle was written.

Fortunately John identifies the doctrine essential to having the Father and the Son. “Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ. No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:23). *Jesus is the Christ!* This is the foundation of the community of saints, the colony of heaven on earth. *Jesus is the Christ!* This is the only confession we may scripturally require of any penitent seeking admission to the fellowship of the redeemed. *Jesus is the Christ!* Every spirit which confesses this is of God. *Jesus is the Christ!* This is the only creed essential to overcoming the world. *Jesus is the Christ!* The one who believes this has the witness in himself.

But what of the advanced thinker who denies this great fact, and who poses his syncretism as special knowledge for the initiated? How was the Gnostic teacher to be treated? How was one who did not abide in this doctrine to be regarded by those who did abide in it?

7. “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 partaker of his evil deeds” (10,11).

”Do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting, for he who greets him shares his wicked work” (Revised Standard Version).

”If any one who comes to you does not bring this teaching, do not receive him under your roof nor greet him; for he who greets him is a sharer of his evil deeds” (Weymouth).

”If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not welcome him into your house or give him a greeting; for anyone who gives him a greeting is an accomplice in his wicked deeds” (New English Version).

”If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your homes, do not even bid him welcome; for he who bids him welcome shares in his evil deeds” (Authentic Version).

In the face of what has already been said I would not presume upon the intelligence of the reader to further identify “the doctrine.” Only those who ignore background, setting, contemporary issues and context, could ever mistake it. The application to other matters could only be made by those with a party axe to grind — those who would fasten upon the phrase “receive him not,” to deny their relationship with the very brethren whom Jesus taught us to love. The warping and wresting of this scripture by factional defenders should serve as a warning to us of what happens to those whose

hearts are filled with the acid of the party spirit and who search the scriptures for a means to separate and segregate themselves from other brethren in the Lord.

I have already once quoted at length from the pen of Frederic W. Farrar in his book *The Early Days of Christianity*. When he produced this noteworthy volume in 1882, he was Canon of Westminster and Chaplain in Ordinary to the queen of England. Perhaps I should be reluctant to burden you with further material from his book, but that volume contains almost a whole chapter dealing with the matter we are now considering. I must omit most of it, as difficult as I find it to do so, and quote for you from his closing paragraphs.

I know nothing so profoundly irreligious as the narrow intolerance of an ignorant dogmatism. Had there been anything in this passage which sanctioned so odious a spirit, I could not have believed that it emanated from St. John. A good tree does not bring forth corrupt fruit. The sweet fountain of Christianity cannot send forth the salt and bitter water of fierceness and hate. The Apostle of love would have belied all that is best in his own teaching if he had consciously given an absolution, nay, an incentive, to furious intolerance. The last words of Christian revelation could never have meant that these words have been interpreted to mean — namely, “Hate, exclude, anathematize, persecute, treat as enemies and opponents to be crushed and insulted, those who differ from you in religious opinions.” Those who have pretended a Scriptural sanction for such Cain-like religionism have generally put their theories into practice against men who have been infinitely more in the right, and transcendently nearer God, than those who, in killing or injuring them, ignorantly thought that were doing God service.

Meanwhile this incidental expression of St. John’s brief letter will not lend itself to these gross perversions. What St. John really says, and really means, is something wholly different. False teachers were rife, who, professing to be Christians, robbed the nature of Christ of all which gave its efficacy to the Atonement, and its significance to the Incarnation. These teachers, like other Christian missionaries, traveled from city to city, and in the absence of public inns, were received into the houses of Christian converts. The Christian lady to whom John writes is warned that, if she offers her hospitality to these dangerous emissaries who were subverting the central truth of Christianity, she is expressing a public sanction of them; and by doing this and offering them her best wishes she is taking a direct share in the harm they do. This is common sense; nor is there anything uncharitable in it. No one is bound to help forward the dissemination of teaching what he regards as erroneous respecting the most essential doctrines of his own faith. Still less would it have been right to do this in the days when Christian communities were so small and weak. But to interpret this as it has in all ages been practically interpreted — to pervert it into a sort of command to exaggerate the minor variations between religious opinions, and to persecute those whose views differ from our own — to make our own opinions the exclusive test of heresy, and to say, with Cornelius a Lapide, that this verse reprobates “all conversation, all intercourse, all dealings with heretics” — is to interpret Scripture by the glare of partisanship and spiritual self-satisfaction, not to read it under the light of holy love.

Alas! churchmen and theologians have found it a far more easy and agreeable matter to obey their distortion of this supposed command, and even to push its stringency to the very farthest limits, than to obey the command that we should love one another! From the Tree of delusive knowledge they pluck the poisonous and inflating fruits of pride and hatred, while they suffer the fruits of love and meekness to fall neglected from the Tree of Life. The popularity which these verses still enjoy, and the exaggerated misinterpretation still attached to them are due to the fact that they are so acceptable to the arrogance and selfishness, the dishonesty and tyranny, the sloth and obstinacy, of that bitter spirit of religious discord which has been the disgrace of the Church and the scandal of the world.

### **Inconsistency of Orthodoxy**

If I may be allowed the indulgence of using a specific example to illustrate the unwarranted application of this passage, let me state that I have heard the expression “this doctrine” applied to every item of controversy among the various factions denominating themselves “The Church of Christ.” Depending upon the particular party whose champion quoted it, the expression has been related to individual cups in the observation of the Lord’s Supper, to Bible classes, colleges, orphan homes, the premillennial viewpoint, instrumental music, missionary societies, and a diversified host of motley issues which have made “the robe of righteousness” a Joseph’s coat which puts the rainbow spectrum to shame.

In every instance these partisan exponents have shown themselves to be utterly inconsistent. They have slashed themselves with one side of the knife which they have sharpened in eager anticipation of stabbing others. But their very inconsistency proves that each is better than his unwritten creed. These brethren dare not apply practically what they claim to believe. Take for example the preacher who quotes 2 John 10,11 in condemnation of one who cannot see that instrumental music as an aid in corporate worship is a sin. Does not the one who deplores the use of the instrument receive the other into his house — either the public meetinghouse or his private dwelling?

The fact is that all of the non-instrumental Church of Christ groups I know, not only receive into their houses those who disagree with them, but go to great lengths to try and get them into their houses. When they hold a meeting they spend money on radio and television programs, as well as newspaper advertising, all beamed at the very ones whom they condemn as “bringing not this doctrine.” They go from door to door, greeting and saluting all and sundry, and when they find someone who does not agree with their position they *urge* him to come. They meet him at the door, welcome him warmly, and give him a “chief seat in the synagogue.”

If 2 John 10,11 applies to “a Christian Church preacher” as my factional brethren so childishly designate those who use instrumental music, I charge that to even allow him to enter the house (much less invite him to come) makes them “accomplices in his evil deeds.” It is such absurd, ridiculous and puerile reasoning which will keep thinking people from seeing the real force and beauty of a plea which began as “a project to unite the Christians in all of the sects.” The very essence of sectarianism is exclusiveness, and if anyone is more exclusive than those who twist this scripture to

justify their own sectarian prejudices I have yet to meet him. Our brethren should be ashamed to live and afraid to die!

Every party among us, even the most reactionary, will greet any person who attends their meetings — after they get over their surprise. Because of a traditional posture they would not call upon him to pray to the Father who is in all, over all and through all, but the ushers will go halfway across the house to provide him with a songbook already turned to the right page, so he can praise God with the congregation. He cannot pray out loud by himself, but he can pray as loud as he wants with others, if the prayer is set to a tune. I am thankful that literally hundreds of brethren are becoming embarrassed by the imbecility and senselessness of the preposterous position in which they find themselves. The party spirit has driven them so far down a blind alley that at least some are trying to scale the fence at the other end and escape back to Main Street again. This is good and I intend to give them a hand when I can.

I propose to regard all of God's children as my brothers. I intend to treat them as brothers. I have resolved to make nothing a test of fellowship which God has not made a condition of salvation. I shall accuse no one of being an antichrist who is built upon the one foundation simply because he differs with me about such things as instrumental music or the millennium. I will not allow our divergent views upon such matters to keep me from associating with any of my brothers, or helping all of them.

I shall go visit any group to share what I have learned, and to share in what they have learned. I shall go with none of them in partisan alliance, for my allegiance is to Jesus Christ. I am joined to Him and through Him to all others who are joined unto Him. Never again will I be a champion of any party, faction or clique. I refuse to be affiliated with any clan in which my love for *these* precludes my love for *those*. He is my all!

Under no circumstances will I apply to those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, those passages written to condemn those who do not confess this fact. My brethren are not Gnostics. They have not gone out from us even though we differ about many issues which disturbed our tranquility. When brethren come to where I am speaking, I shall not seek to determine where they stand on all of the troublesome issues before I call upon them to pray. These are matters between them and our Lord. If they can explain their position to His satisfaction, they need not try to satisfy me with their explanation. I am not so much interested in where they stand as in the direction they are facing. I shall recognize their right to pray because they are in Him and not because they are in some party. I have no party and no party has me! This last is more important than the first. I know a lot of brethren who claim to have no faction, but a faction has a claim upon them. They stand in jeopardy ever hour!

Upon the one foundation living stones are builded together. These stones are not all the same size, shape, texture or variety. A stone house must be built with the stones available in the area. Since stones vary from one area to another, a house in one location may not look like that in another. The house of God is not made of stones that are uniform in knowledge, perception, ability or aptitude. It is composed of those who are joined together by mutual faith in Jesus and cemented by love. The foundation for all is the eternal abiding principle in confessional form, that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son



of God.” What a majestic truth! What a glorious fact! “If any man come and bring not this doctrine receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting!”

## Chapter 10

### ***THE ONE FAITH***

It is very difficult for most of us to grasp the real essence of the redeemed life. We are conditioned by environment and experience to resist its simplicity, and to try and mould and make it into a pattern to fit our preconceived notions. We live in a world of automation and systematization. We are dominated by monster machines of our own creation which have, under the guise of making life easier, robbed us of our freedom and individuality. We have become statistics instead of persons, we have numbers instead of names, we are slaves to punch cards which rule our earnings and regulate our disbursements.

It is not to be wondered at, that in such a world, we should be seduced into an attempt to reduce our most intimate relationships to standardized procedures, properly classified and codified. Nor should we be amazed that men forget that the relationships always suffer a tortured and agonizing death, throttled by monotony and tormented by a sense of duty and a fear of forgetfulness. A man who draws up a code of marital responsibility in which he agrees to kiss his wife three times per week, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, at 7:00 o'clock p.m., Central Standard Time, will soon have no wife to kiss. There are areas in human existence which must be left free for spontaneous expression. There are crannies of the heart which are too sacred for the prying eyes of other administrators to explore in an attempt to legislate what shall occupy them. An effort by another to thrust himself into them will serve only to shatter the fragile vessel.

Our gracious Father in heaven fully understands our needs and yearnings. He knows the manifold complexities of human personality because He made us. In all ages He has adapted His revelation to the needs and conditions of men in their own day. He sent the world of mankind to school for hundreds of years, providing able teachers in the persons of the prophets, who labored in the primary and elementary eras of the world to bring that world to maturity. In this last age He has spoken unto us through His Son.

While preparing the world for the coming of this dispensation, God acted through law in the form of a written code. At the very outset He provided a constitution for Israel, specific in detail and meticulous in its provisions. It is evident that any commonwealth in which justification is to be attempted by law must have that law fully and completely spelled out at the very inception. The commandments cannot be given piecemeal as the people violate the spirit of the arrangement, else men will die because of ignorance of that which has not yet been given.

The advent of Jesus marked a great change. The cross is the "Great Divide" in human history. "Christ is the end of the law for justification" (Romans 10:4). "The law was our custodian until Christ came ... we are no longer under a custodian" (Gal. 3:24,25). Law was supplanted by faith, but faith is neither a law nor a custodian. If it is either, then Christ died in vain. "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom. 3:28). "But now that faith has come we are no longer under a custodian" (Gal. 3:25).

The Christian faith has always faced the same problem which has plagued society. Maturity cannot be measured by the calendar. A great many who should be mature because of age (or the age) reveal that they still have infantile or adolescent traits. At Corinth Paul could not address the brethren “as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ.” But he wrote, “Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom” (1 Cor. 2:6). The writer to the Hebrews faced the problem. “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need some one to teach you again the first principles of God’s word. You need milk, not solid food; for every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb. 5:12-14).

One of the basic needs of the human being is a sense or feeling of security, and from infancy until death, he acts or reacts in such a manner as to provide for it. Some of the reactions may be unconscious, or appear to be unrelated to the need but are governed by it nonetheless. The adolescent, who is conditioned to expect security in the home and as a member of the family, because of the father-child relationship, finds security in specific laws and strict enforcement. He inwardly craves restraint and secretly regards it as a token of affection. Arbitrary laws are essential to his wellbeing.

On the same basis, God’s children, having grown up in an age when they are to be treated as men, but suffering from immaturity, seek for security in a legalistic code. Unable to truly exercise the freedom to love and exist on the plane of the Spirit which is above law, they must take the provisions of grace and warp and twist them into a written code, and then exercise police powers over their brethren who are more humble than themselves, to enforce their code in ruthless disregard for the conscience of others. This is equated with being loyal to God and faithful to the Bible when actually it is detrimental to the whole Christian revelation and utterly disruptive of the fellowship which Jesus came to create.

### **The Relationship of Faith**

It is obvious that our relationship is founded upon *faith*. In Christ we are justified by faith (Romans 5:1). We walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). We live by faith (Gal. 2:20). We receive the promise of the Spirit by faith (Gal. 3:14). Indeed it is true that “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.” Any misunderstanding of the relationship of faith can be fatal to the whole Christian structure exactly as an entire building can be endangered by weakening the foundation.

This leads us to the examination of what we believe to be a palpable error in the thinking of many brethren in our day. It is manifested in their treatment of the term “the faith” and is especially exhibited in their conclusions concerning Ephesians 4:5, where the apostle informs us there is “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” The “one faith” is frequently explained as being the entire collection of new covenant scriptures, and, what is worse, these scriptures taken as an extended written code, or legalistic system.

The advocates of orthodoxy seem not to realize that the very scriptures which they regard as a written code declare we have no such arrangement. One of the chief writers of the letters embraced in these scriptures, a man who wrote more of them than any other, declared that “God qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a

written code but in the Spirit, for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6). Again he writes, “But we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code, but in the new life of the Spirit” (Romans 7:6). Jesus did not nail one law to the cross and hand another one down!

It is a common thing to hear *the one faith* described as “the system of faith including the whole New Testament.” Nowhere in the scriptures is our relationship to Jesus defined in such language. No one who speaks as the Bible speaks can justifiably employ this kind of terminology. We are joined to Him in an intimate embrace in spirit as a man is joined to his wife in the flesh. “But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (1 Cor. 6:17). You cannot reduce a person to a system. In reality there is no such thing as a systematic theology or systematic Christian relationship. These are creations of men. They are responsible for most of the spiritual ills in the world.

We have no inclination to verbally assault our brethren who are guilty of trying to cling to the Judaistic philosophy of legalistic justification and who live B.C. lives in an A.D. world. Instead we feel a sense of compassion as we always do for those who still exhibit juvenile tendencies when they are grown men. We realize that all of these carried-over adolescent traits result from fears and frustrations which are unresolved in their hearts. Rather we seek to deliver them from their ingrown inhibitions and partisan impediments so they may grow up in Christ Jesus and act like men.

We have an abiding confidence in the power of truth to dispel error as the dawn drives away the darkness and the rising sun burns away the fog. We do not lose heart when months of repetition are required before our brothers gain a faint glimmer of what is being said. We are content to labor and to wait, to plant and allow God to provide the increase. It is in that spirit we examine the expression “the one faith” to determine its nature and content. We shall seek to provide certain guidelines for our study as we proceed.

## **Faith and Doctrine**

1. The faith by which we are justified was fully proclaimed on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Nothing was ever added to it as a basis for justification. The faith which justifies is “the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27) and the gospel was announced in its fullness and perfection by the heralds of the King on that day. All that was demanded of any alien to become a citizen and to enter into the fellowship of the ransomed ones was contained in this initial message. Those who obeyed its demands did not obey an imperfect gospel.

2. In the early days of the Way, “the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to *the faith*” (Acts 6:27). The faith to which the priests became obedient was the faith to which the penitents on Pentecost became obedient. There was but one faith. Thus men embraced the faith twenty years before the first letter was written by an apostle. It is evident that the collection of letters constituting the new covenant scriptures were not a part of the faith.

3. When Paul landed at Cyprus on his first preaching tour, about 48 A.D., he was summoned by Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, who was anxious to hear the word of

God. “But Elymas the magician, withstood them, seeking to turn away the proconsul from *the faith*” (Acts 13:8). This was four years before Paul wrote his first epistle and there is no indication he ever addressed a letter to Cyprus. Thus it was possible for men to be obedient to the faith, and to be turned away from the faith, years before any part of the new covenant scriptures was written.

4. On that same tour which reached as far as Derbe, Paul returned through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch “strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith” (Acts 14:22). Thus men were in the faith and able to continue in it before even one apostolic letter was penned. But the faith in which they were to continue was that which Paul had brought them. Fortunately we can learn what it was. At Antioch the apostle referred to David and said, “Of this man’s posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised” (Acts 13:23). Again, “And we bring you the good news that what God has promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus” (verses 32, 33). Again, “Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (verses 38,39).

This was the faith which was proclaimed, the faith which they embraced, the faith in which they were to continue. This is the one faith. Paul defines it as “my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages.” He says that this is “made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about obedience to *the faith*” (Romans 16:25,26).

5. Not one of the apostolic epistles was written to introduce men to the faith or to induct them into it. Every letter, without exception, was addressed to those in the faith and because they were in it. For instance, in 1 Corinthians (16:13) the sanctified in Christ Jesus are urged to “stand fast in the faith.” In 2 Corinthians (13:5) they are given the instruction, “Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith.”

6. If the apostolic epistles constituted the one faith, no congregation of saints on earth, during the lifetime of the apostles, could have the faith in its perfection or completeness. These letters were written to different congregations and individuals and were not collected or compiled until long after the apostles were dead.

7. If the epistles constituted the faith only one of the apostles could possibly have known the faith in its fullness. All of them, including Paul had been slain thirty years or more before John wrote the last of the sacred canon. Some of the apostles may never have seen or read a single letter included in the new covenant scriptures, yet all of them proclaimed the faith. Not one of them, except John, knew anything about his three letters or those addressed to the churches of Asia.

8. The first epistle of which we have record is 1 Thessalonians, probably written about 52 A.D., from Corinth. Yet, the year before that, “the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily” (Acts 16:5). Before the epistle was sent the Thessalonians were in the faith, for they had “turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for his son from heaven.” The apostle said he thanked God continually for the fact “that when you received the word of God which you heard from

us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess. 2:13,14).

The one faith is not a compendium of moral principles, a code of ethics, or a compilation of laws. It is not a collection of letters, even though divinely authorized and produced by agency of the Spirit. It is the firm conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and that He was “put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25). The very next statement is, “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Upon no other basis of justification can such peace be secured.

We must honor with our attention the passages cited by honest brothers under the mistaken view that these support their legalistic claims. In doing so we are not attacking men but simply investigating their use, or misuse of the sacred scriptures. It is amazing how men, motivated by partisan considerations, can unwittingly bend the word of God to justify and condone the sin of division and the scandal of schism.

### Like Precious Faith

It is urged that 2 Peter 1:1 advocates the idea of conformity and uniformity as God’s demand, in the expression “like precious faith.” The letter is addressed to them “that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” The like precious faith is considered to be agreement with the partisan position on whatever matters have been exalted to such a status that a faction has formed about them. Although this will seem utterly ridiculous to real students of the Bible it must still be dealt with because of its propagation by sincere, but misguided advocates of a partisan approach to life.

The second epistle of Peter was written to the same persons as the first (2 Peter 3:1) and these were God’s chosen ones scattered throughout Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1). They believed in God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and gave Him glory, that their faith and hope might be in God (1 Peter 1:21 ) They had purified their souls in obeying the truth and had been born again of the gospel which had been preached unto them (1:22-25). But Peter declares that in time past they were not a people, but are now the people of God (1 Peter 2:10). Peter was a Jew as were all of the other apostles. The gospel was first preached to the Jews, and later the Gentiles were admitted to the faith.

It was natural for Peter as “a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ” to address his letter “to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God.” James MacKnight in his *Apostolical Epistles* paraphrases this, “Symeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to all, both Jews and Gentiles, who have obtained like precious faith in the gospel with us believing Jews .... The word for “like precious” is *isotimos*, which is a term of quality or nature. It is from *isos*, equal; and *time*, value or honor. The faith obtained by the Gentiles through the righteousness of God was in no sense inferior to that obtained by the Jews, although the latter had primacy in publication and proclamation. It was a faith equal in value or honor. The term has not one thing to do with those *in the faith* agreeing upon every detail of understanding and interpretation, desirous as that might be. It is not even related to our

being alike. The statement is that all who enjoy the righteousness of God have obtained the same precious faith. There is one faith for both Jew and Gentile.

It is a startling commentary on the destructive violence of the party spirit when one realizes that otherwise good and gentle men are betrayed into equating the faith which all of us share in Christ Jesus with narrow partisan tests of communion. To Peter it was a source of rejoicing that others were *included* in the like precious faith; to orthodox factionalists it is a matter of loyalty to Christ to use the same passage to *exclude* believers from their "fellowship." Betrayed by the use of the word "like" in the King James Version the cult of the rubber stamp gleefully raises the banner of conformity over rival institutions, demanding that all who enter bow to the party mandates. One need not be a scholar of reputation to question the partisan usage of the verse. Even a reading of other versions would be enough to make the party application suspect.

"To those who through the justice of our God and Savior Jesus Christ share our faith and enjoy equal privilege with ourselves" (New English Bible).

"To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours" (Revised Standard Version).

"To those who have been given, through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, a faith as precious as our own" (The New Testament in Plain English).

"To those who by the beneficence of our God and of our Savior Jesus Christ have obtained a faith equal in privilege with ours" (The Authentic Version).

### **The Faith Once Delivered**

*Beloved, when I give all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).*

It is argued by factional leaders that "the faith" here spoken of is the entire body of new covenant scriptures. In addition, each party includes in "the faith" the particular and peculiar traditional interpretation and deductions which separate and segregate it from all other believers, sects and parties. The content of the faith which was "once for all delivered to the saints" differs with each contentious party among the saints. No two have the same "faith." Instead of "one faith" there are as many faiths as there are factions.

To differ with the party on the one item which is its distinctive and exclusive test of union and communion is to deny the faith and thus to bring upon one the treatment accorded to "a heathen and a publican." If a congregation divides over a millennial theory, the one who contends for an explanation contrary to the accepted traditional view denies the faith. Regardless of how much he loves Jesus and believes in Him, or how pure his life and how fervent his spirit might be, he has denied the Faith when he cannot in good conscience truckle to the edicts and pronouncements or kowtow in abject submission to those "who seem to be somewhat."

Jude was not even speaking of the apostolic letters, much less of the fanciful farfetched and fitful interpretations placed upon them. The faith once for all delivered had been received before he wrote his letter so it is evident the epistle of Jude was not part of it.

We can determine from the immediate context the nature of the faith and the reason for the exhortation to contend for it. The word “contend” is a term of combat. It is *epagonizomai* in the Greek. W. E. Vine says it “signifies to contend about a thing, as a combatant.” We can ascertain the nature of the faith for which contention must be made by the character of the opposition.

The opposers were ungodly men. They had secretly infiltrated the camp of the saints. They perverted the grace of God into licentiousness. They denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Against such characters, long ago designated for condemnation, “the sanctified, preserved and called ones” (verse 1) were to battle intensely for preservation of “the faith which was once delivered.” It is obvious that *the faith* was related to the proper concept of grace and its function, and the acknowledgment of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. These were the things being perverted and denied which made the earnest contention so essential.

One can hardly think of anything more detrimental to God’s purpose or to Christ’s prayer for unity than to apply such scriptures to the differences arising between brothers. Are our brothers who differ with us in opinion about the issues which trouble us ungodly persons? Are they the kind of individuals who were long ago designated for condemnation? Do they pervert the grace of God into licentiousness? Have they denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ? The truth is that regardless of the right or wrong of the things about which we have debated among ourselves, not one of them is a part of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. To confuse them with the faith is to confound sinners and mobilize the saints for savage civil strife. It is also to reveal the meagerness of our own scholarship and the dearth of our love. Our brethren are all in the faith once delivered. They have not denied it. They cherish it and revere it, although they cannot agree with us about every idea we hold.

The faith delivered once for all is that which produces our common salvation. It is that which initiates us all into the majestic covenantal relationship with the Father and Son. It is that which inaugurates fellowship with Deity and adopts us into the heavenly family. It is this faith based upon grace which severs us from the old life of sin and gives us access to eternal life — “the eternal life which was with the Father and manifested unto us.”

### **Denying the Faith**

The acceptance of the revolutionary truth that Jesus is the Son of God and our Master and Lord, by its very nature obligates us to imitate His life as partakers of the divine nature. As truth becomes available unto us we must embrace and apply it to our own life and conduct, or we deny the faith which brings us into relationship with the truth. To deliberately rebel against the life demanded by the relationship we sustain in the faith is to disown that relationship and the faith which creates it.

Faith is the foundation of the Christian life and love is its embodiment. In Christ Jesus “faith which works by love” is what counts. Love is the fulfilling of the law. All the commandments are summed up in it (Romans 13:10). Love must be in deed and in truth, not in mere word or speech. “But if any one has this world’s goods and sees his



brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him" (1 John 3:17).

This will explain the passage which is often used against our thesis. In 1 Timothy 5 the apostle gives instruction relating to the care of widows. The community of saints is ordered to sustain real widows, that is those who are left all alone and bereft of all immediate relatives. Those widows having children or grandchildren are to be supported by their offspring. The record says, "If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (verse 8).

Many unbelievers, motivated only by a natural affection, would not allow a widowed mother to suffer. A Christian has the additional motive of belonging to Christ Jesus, whose ministry was summed up in the words, "He went about doing good." To refuse to love others is to deny the working principle of the faith which is intended to bind us to Jesus. It is to make our profession empty, shallow and senseless. Rowland Hill was wont to remark that when a man becomes a Christian even his dog knows the difference. E. K. Simpson said, "A religious profession which falls below the standard of duty recognized by the world is a wretched fraud."

### **Birth and Growth**

The faith relates to the life and death of Jesus; the apostolic epistles relate to our own life and death. The faith portrays what Jesus has done and will do for us, and we accept it: the doctrine portrays what we must do for Jesus and we attempt it. One comes by proclamation; the other by indoctrination. Both are the word of God, but the gospel has to do with our begetting, the doctrine with our development. One may be begotten in a minute but continue to grow for a lifetime. One does not digest all of the food God has provided on the day he is born.

To confuse the faith which all must have to be in Christ with knowledge of the word which all must acquire as they grow in Christ is a tragic error. To make fellowship contingent upon uniformity in degree of knowledge is a fatal fallacy. If fellowship is based upon the faith, and the faith consists of every epistle in the new covenant scriptures, then one must fully know every passage or he cannot be in the faith. Yet Paul declares, "If any one imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:2). This proves we are all deficient in knowledge, and the one who imagines that he is not is worse off than the others.

Those who plead for uniformity in knowledge of the word of God as a basis for fellowship must either demand perfect knowledge or else they must designate the areas in which one must know to be in the fellowship, as distinguished from those areas in which he may be ignorant and still be justified of God. How much in God's word can one be mistaken about and still be justified? What percentage must he be right about before God no longer recognizes him as in the family? How much must one grow in intellectual attainment in order to continue as a brother? How sick must one become from spiritual vitamin deficiency before the Father disowns him as a child?

To postulate that one must have perfect knowledge of every detail of revelation is to require inerrancy and infallibility and to demand that he be God. This is what I call "the

Haman's gallows argument." It is affirmed that fellowship with ourselves is contingent upon knowing all we know and understanding everything as we do, which means that our own fellowship with God is dependent upon knowing all that God knows and understanding everything as He does. Since no one is rash enough to claim this for himself, he admits he is not in fellowship with God, and damns himself by the argument he concocted to deny others. "By what judgment you judge you will be judged."

On the other hand, if he concedes that others do not need to agree upon every matter of doctrinal interpretation in order to be in the fellowship, he must exercise his human judgment as to what portion is essential. When he binds this upon others as a term of communion he exercises the prerogative of God. Was not the revelation of God given to all of the saints? Do others not have the same freedom as ourselves to make those emphases which are commended to their own intellects and consciences as important and relevant to the Christian walk? If, in the physical life, we must recognize the difference in digestive ability and capacity, shall we not do the same in the spiritual realm? Is not growth in the family of God progressive and individual?

Life is more important than food. "Is not the life more than meat?" (Matt. 6:25). The whole purpose of food is to sustain life. Bread which comes from the earth is the staff of physical life. The bread which came down from heaven is the staff of spiritual life. Any use of food to impair life, or any application of a theory of nutrition to destroy life, is criminal. If our emphasis upon physical food is such as to destroy human life and its relationships we have a warped view of the place of both life and bread. In the same manner we must regard the sacredness of the life in Christ Jesus as superior to the given means of growth. Our sense of values must never become so distorted that we sacrifice life for doctrinal correctness, especially when that correctness is determined by our own deductions and interpretations. Bread has not been given for the purpose of pounding the other children over the head. No one but the Great Physician can determine the proper amount of spiritual food intake and rate of growth for each of God's children. Those who berate others may themselves be deficient. Our problem is that we have too many "doctors" practicing without a license, each heading his own little clinic and dispensary.

The true basis of our continuance in corporate unity can never be predicated upon an arbitrarily determined degree of knowledge at a given time. If it is, we shall need to exclude from our fellowship in the afternoon those whom we baptized in the morning. If it be argued that when men come into Christ, we must give them time to grow, the same principle will force us to continue to be patient, forbearing and tolerant with them as long as they are growing in Him. Thus the basis of the corporate functioning in Christ is the faith which creates the state, and a proper attitude toward truth of those within that state. One may love truth and know little of it, or he may know a great deal and have but little respect for it. In the final analysis *attitude* is the determinant factor between true discipleship and sectarianism. One is not a sectarian because of where he happens to be at a given time, but because of his attitude toward truth regardless of where he is. This must never be forgotten, for if we forget it we will probably be sectarian.

## Doctrinal Values

What relationship has the apostolic doctrine upon which we feed, with the faith which produces our life, or, for that matter, is our life? To phrase the question in another fashion, what relationship exists between the seed or sperm by which we are begotten and the food of which we partake after birth? What relationship exists between the pasture upon which a sheep forages and that which makes it a sheep? We propose to face up to these matters frankly, fully and fearlessly. In order for you to follow our reasoning with greater facility we will present our views in numerical sequence.

1. Both the gospel (Good News) which brings us into affinity with eternal life and the apostolic doctrine which sustains us, are the word of God. Paul commended the Thessalonians because they accepted the gospel “not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess. 2:13). To the Corinthians he wrote, “If any one thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized” (1 Cor. 14:37, 38). We accept without question or quibble that the Good News of salvation in Christ Jesus and the means of Christian growth are both from the Father of lights.

2. The apostolic letters do not constitute the new covenant, or new testament, and are nowhere said to do so in the sacred writings. The new covenant is not a written code (2 Cor. 3:6). It is not even written with ink (2 Cor. 3:3). The apostolic letters were written with pen and ink (3 John 13). The new covenant is an individual and personal Agreement by which one commits himself to, and is adopted by God into His family, as a child. This covenant is written on human hearts by the Spirit of the living God (2 Cor. 3:3; Heb. 8:10). This divine-human Compact cannot be effected by any other person on earth for another. Neither can it be affected by any other person. Read those two sentences again!

3. Those who heard the Good News on Pentecost, and accepted its implications for their lives entered into the new covenant relationship as fully as any other persons ever did since that time. At the moment, they knew nothing of the apostolic doctrine which was gradually revealed over a period of many years as need arose and abuses were created by those in the covenantal relationship. The gospel which produced the covenantal relationship had to be announced prior to that relationship which it was to create and which grew out of it; while the apostolic doctrine was revealed as a need was felt for information as to conduct and behavior in Christ. The entrance into the life relationship was not contingent upon knowledge of subsequent doctrine. The gospel was to make children of God; the apostolic doctrine was to make children of God better.

4. The Good News was never proclaimed to any person with any other intention or objective than to bring him into covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ. No apostolic letter was ever written to any person or group to bring such person or group into the covenant relationship. All letters were written to those in the covenant relationship and because they were in it. The very first letter Paul wrote was addressed to those who were in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The second letter was addressed to the same identical ones.

5. The apostolic epistles are not a pattern or blueprint. They were never intended to be. There is a difference between a love letter and a blueprint. One may contain advice but the other sets forth specifications. A blueprint must always be available in full and in the hands of the builders before construction starts. There were many in Christ Jesus who actually suffered death for Him before the first epistle was written. Congregations of saints had been planted and grew in spiritual stature before letters were ever written to them. Our pattern is a person! Our life is unity with that person! “He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life” (1 John 5:12). “He is our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). Our pattern is not external but internal. Our lives are shaped and transformed by the Spirit and not by an external code. We “are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

6. The purpose of the apostolic epistles is to provide, by our assimilation of truth as revealed, for our growth in the divine nature in order that we may automatically and spontaneously act and react to given situations as Jesus would under the same circumstances. It was when congregations responded as Jesus would that Paul wrote them letters of thanksgiving and commendation as he did to Philippi, “Let your bearing toward one another arise out of your life in Christ Jesus” (2:5). It was when they did not that he wrote them of the dangers attendant upon such a course. “But that is not how you learned Christ” (Eph. 4:20). Christianity is not Jesus pointing us to a book as a pattern, but a book pointing us to Jesus as our pattern.

This will make all of the difference in the world in our attitude toward each other. Every sincere person thinks he understands and does just what the book teaches. His stock-in-trade remedy for disunity is the platitude, “If everyone will just take the Bible for what it says, and do just what it teaches we will all be one.” This old cliché has been proven unrealistic and unworkable. Those who mouth it are most divided and strife-torn. In spite of the sincerity of each, what is actually meant is, “If everyone will just take the Bible for what I say it means, and do just what I teach it requires, we will all be one.” All of our confusion stems from the fact that every one who regards the Bible as our pattern thinks he perfectly grasps that pattern while others labor in ignorance, stubbornness and stupidity. All of us have seen communities where there are five or six different groups who say that if everyone will take the Bible for what it says, unity will result, and yet none of the six have anything to do with any of the others. The world is catching on to such childishness and inconsistency.

Once we recognize that Jesus is the pattern, it follows that the greater our sincerity the more humbly will we admit that we fall far short of this example, and the easier it is to recognize that none of us are perfectly following the pattern. Thus we can receive each other in Christ as equals — not in knowledge, understanding or perception — but in our need of grace to save. It creates a lot of difference in attitude if we think that some of us are already on higher ground tossing a rope to those who are floundering about in the waves, or if we recognize that all of us are still in the deep and are all struggling together to reach a goal or ideal. We need to be careful that we do not secretly pride ourselves that it is by *our* grace others can be saved.

The real criterion is not at all our knowledge of a code or book, even though divinely given. It is love for a person. In the school of Jesus it is not mastery of a text but

affection for the teacher which brings recognition. Knowledge inflates self, but love inspires imitation of another. As the apostle puts it, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if one loves God, one is known by him" (1 Cor. 8:1-3). Of course if we truly love Him we will want to hear what He says and do what He asks us to do. We will not do this because of legalistic demands but because of loving commands.

7. Nothing we have said herein is intended to derogate the apostolic epistles. It is written simply to place doctrine in proper perspective, to enable us to regard it as God intended. To say that life does not originate with bread is not to speak disparagingly of bread. To observe that family relationship is not created by food is in no sense to undervalue food. The man who truly grasps what we are saying will find the revealed will of God growing more precious unto him day by day. This has been our personal experience in the freedom we enjoy from the pettifogging trivia which legalistic attitudes convert into tests of communion. "Christ sets us free, to be free men. Stand firm, then, and refuse to be tied to the yoke of slavery again" (Gal. 5:1). We intend to study God's precious truth for ourselves. We shall allow no one to do our thinking on earth who cannot answer for us at the judgment. And this very resolution makes every word within the sacred pages pulsate with life and glow with the light of new meaning and relevance in our own life.

### **Doctrine and Fellowship**

Every person who truly loves the Father will want to know all that the Father has said. While it is true that one who commits himself to Christ obligates himself by that very act to familiarize himself with all that God has taught, he will not do so out of a sense of obligation but as a joyful privilege. It is one thing to study to be a shrewd lawyer, and a wholly different thing to study to be a loving and affectionate son. Such a son will be as tolerant of others in their deficiencies as the Father is of his weaknesses. He will not set up a standard for others which God has not set up for all. This warrants the following observations.

1. The word of God has a meaning and the doctrine of God can be understood. Such understanding can only result from diligent investigation by earnest students who examine the text of the revelation and apply to their research those rules of logical interpretation which govern such matters. When proper examination has been made, free from preconceived bias, the result must be conceded to be the doctrine of Christ as given through the holy envoys, the apostles.

2. In view of the fact that such conclusions must depend in part, or in whole, upon the deductions made from the sacred scriptures, and thus represent the sacred oracles as filtered through human rational processes, the conclusions cannot be constituted conditions of union or communion, or tests of one's relationship to the Father. They must not be regarded as the basis for life but of growth, and that rate differs with each individual who is in Christ.

3. The deductions from the sacred revelation as made by one individual, or a group of individuals conducting research in concert, are not formally binding upon any other individual, unless commended unto such individual by his own investigation, perception

and conscience. They can be shared with others but not saddled upon them, for they can be binding only to the degree and in the measure that they are personally grasped and comprehended. If this be not true the following evils will result.

- a. Individual responsibility will be destroyed and men will be subjected to creedal tests and criteria arbitrarily imposed.
- b. Those who concur with such imposition upon themselves will repose their faith in the wisdom of men rather than in the wisdom of God.
- c. The supreme court of appeal will be “the infallible interpretation” of each party, a thought as reprehensible as “an infallible interpreter,” or pope.

4. No opinion, honestly held by a child of God can be made a basis of fellowship or a test of it. Such an opinion must never be bound upon others as a creed, nor must others threaten excommunication of one who holds such opinion if he does not relinquish it. The sword of the Spirit must never be used to kill or destroy those who are indwelt of the Spirit. Separation upon the basis of opinion must never be condoned. The called out ones are never called out from among the called out.

All of God’s children are my beloved brethren. I have no brothers who are not beloved. I have no half-brothers, step-brothers, or brothers-in-law in Christ Jesus. Many of my brothers disagree with me about some things, and some of my brothers disagree with me about many things. On every controversial issue which has disturbed our tranquility some of my brothers take one position, while some take another.

They are all my brothers, not because of any of their views but in spite of all of them. I shall recognize them as brothers publicly and privately. I will call upon them to pray and participate in my meetings. I will love them and cherish them. I will maintain my personal convictions about all of our troublesome problems, but I will not allow these to negate or deny the sublimity of our relationship.

We are members of the same body. We are branches of the same Vine. We are sheep of the same flock. We are children of the same Father. No one will ever herd me into a corral where I must set at nought or boorishly treat some of my brothers to be recognized and used by a group of others. I value the Lord and His love too highly. The price one pays for factionalism is too great. The Christ whom I serve is not a party chieftain but Lord of the whole church. He is not the president of a faction but the head of the whole body — every member of it!

I have no perfect brothers. They are all brothers in error. All of them are as weak and fallible, as helpless and remiss, as myself. Some are in error on some things, some on other things, but none of them know all there is to know, and none are free from error. No, not one! It is foolish and arrogant for brothers in error to label others as “brothers in error” as if those who slapped on the label were free from error. Such men, knowing their own failures and shortcomings should bow in abject humility before the Father of all and entreat for His forgiveness.

If I am in the fellowship with any brothers at all they are brothers in error. This does not bother me because it is this kind of persons to whom grace is extended. Those who are as perfect as God will not need the blessings of grace. I do not love error. I deplore it. I simply love my brothers and I do not intend to deny brotherhood on the basis of

imbecility, lack of understanding or mistaken views. If life in Christ consisted of being right about everything and every point of doctrine, I would have to confess I have never lived, and the "I" of today would have to sever all relationship with the "Me" of yesterday.

I do not plead that my brethren accept anything which cuts across personal conscience or is contrary to conviction. I simply plead that they quit playing God and accept all of God's children as their brothers. God does not tell us how to treat the lengthy catalogue of disturbing items. He does tell us how to treat our brothers. I might be right about all of these things and go to hell because I did not show love for my brothers, or, I might be mistaken about a lot of things and go to heaven because I love my Father and all of His children.

We live in Christ through the faith, the one faith, the faith once for all delivered. That faith is created by the cross. It is not a faith based upon being in the right position about everything, but upon being in the right Person. I shall elevate nothing higher than the cross. I will allow nothing to overshadow it. I will permit the blood of the cross to blot from my life those things which hinder, but I will permit none of those to blot out the blood of the cross. The life is in the blood. I will use the cross to batter down walls between brethren but I will not use it to batter down brethren.

It is the cross which made me free to love and to serve. It is the cross which made it possible for me to accept all others as God accepted me, not because I was worthy, but in spite of my unworthiness. I will cling to the cross and through it I will cling to every other person who does the same. The greatest unifying instrument in this fragmented world is the cross of Jesus. With it we can stop the silly division and the inane fighting which has made us to appear ridiculous in the eyes of the pagan world. One in Christ! One at the cross! This is what the faith once delivered is all about!

## Chapter 11

### **THE GREAT PROBLEM**

It has been said more than once in this volume that “fellowship” is the English term most often used as a rendering for the Greek *koinonia*. It is not the equivalent of *koinonia*, for equivalent means “equal in value or power,” and there is no single English word capable of capturing the full meaning of *koinonia*. The translators who gave us *The New English Bible* knew this and used the expression “sharing in the common life.” My own investigation leads me to endorse this as the best rendering known to me.

Fellowship is composed of the two words “fellow” and “ship.” Fellow is from the Anglo-Saxon *felagi*, comrade or partner. It has been surmised that it may have originally signified those who bound themselves together by a blood-covenant. If this is so, the word signified more than a casual partnership in land or business, but there is no real evidence to sustain this. “Ship” is a suffix indicating state or condition. Sonship is a state in which we share as sons, companionship is a state in which we share as companions. Fellowship is a state in which we share as fellows, that is, as associates or peers.

The word “fellow” shows it is a relation of persons to each other, and not of persons to ideas or things. No one ever asks, “Do you companionship automobiles”? Nor does one ever ask, “Do you partnership the common market theory”? But that is no more ridiculous than to ask, “Do you fellowship instrumental music in corporate worship?” or “Do you fellowship premillennialism”? It would be just as absurd to ask, “Do you partnership your associate in the service station”? Yet we constantly hear those who are ignorant of the significance of fellowship asking, “Do you fellowship this individual or that?” You may be in partnership with your associate, and in the fellowship with your brethren, but we need to keep our language straight unless we wish to demonstrate that our ideas are warped.

In the context of the new covenant, fellowship is the state or condition of sharing in the life of Jesus Christ into which we are called by God (1 Corinthians 1:9). God issued the call through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14), a distinct proclamation of seven historical facts designed to establish the most sublime truth of all ages, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. The response to this call is belief of the fact and submission to the lordship of Jesus in one act, immersion in water under His authority or name. Every person in the universe who believes with all of his heart that Jesus is the Messiah and God’s Son, and who is immersed in validation of that faith is in the fellowship. He is in it by an act of God. He is received of the Lord to the glory of God (Romans 15:7).

We are called as individuals, we respond as individuals, and we are received as individuals. But we are not simply called out of the world, we are also called together in Christ. We share in the common life of the Father and Son, which is eternal life, but because we do we also share with all others who share that life (1 John 1:3). We are not joined to Jesus because we are joined to others, but we are joined to others because we are joined to Jesus. Our relationship on the horizontal plane does not create our relationship on the vertical plane, but our relationship on the vertical plane creates our relationship on the horizontal.



This means that what one does or thinks on the horizontal plane need not affect the vertical relationship of another at all unless he personally condones or endorses it. No one is held responsible for anything which he disavows. Jesus plainly taught that individuals could be in a congregation which was dead and whose works were not perfect before God, and still walk with him in white because they were worthy (Revelation 3:1-4). Indeed, He also taught that persons could be in a congregation where a woman taught and seduced his servants to commit fornication, but if they refused her doctrine and practice and kept His word to the end, they would be blessed.

Obviously there will be some things occur among brethren in which one cannot participate because of conscience. One must never violate his personal conviction by sharing in any view or act which appears to him to be contrary to the will of God. But such differences will not affect the fellowship which results from our relationship to Jesus unless one or the other denies the Son of God or renounces His rule. Our fellowship with God is not conditioned upon seeing everything alike or upon doing everything in the same fashion but upon receiving Jesus as the Messiah and His Son. So long as we do not deliberately repudiate this conviction by word or deed the fellowship remains intact.

Fortunately we have a good example of this in the letter Paul addressed to the Romans. There were those who could freely eat meat and others whose consciences would not allow them to do so. Certainly the latter could not jointly participate with the former in this action. But this did not affect the fellowship, for the simple reason that God had received them. "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him" (Romans 14:3). One of our human problems has always been the false assumption that if we could not jointly participate in some things we could not work together in anything.

What has been overlooked is that God's children can differ in Christ although they cannot differ about who He is. They need not regard everything alike, but everything they regard must be to the Lord. "He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it." So long as two persons exalt their relationship to the Lord above their differences they can keep both their differences and one another. It is only when what they think means more than what God did for them that they fall apart. This is not so much an indication of fidelity to God's word as it is a sign of egotism. It is a form of idolatry in which men worship their opinions more than they respect God's power and purpose. It is always a sin to destroy a brother for meat or for anything else!

We do not create the fellowship for God has done that. He invites us to share in it by becoming His sons and daughters through faith. Our task is to demonstrate the beauty and strength of a fellowship based upon faith, to a cold and cynical world. We can best do this by manifesting an unbroken love for and attachment to those who differ with us about many things. The world expects those who see everything alike to work together, but to see those laboring in unity who do not concur with each other proves that they have discovered a dynamic more powerful than the carnal nature. It is for this reason that all division within the family of God is condemned. Such division is never once authorized as the solution to fraternal disagreement. Christ is not divided and those in Christ must not be.

It is the thesis of this book that opinions and doctrinal interpretations are occasions for differences, but never for division. It is no sin to differ but it is a sin to divide. Congregations should provide an umbrella of love under which saints with divergent views can find shelter and be loved and cherished. We must make a distinction between a man and his rationalizations. We are not called upon to agree with one's ideas but to accept his person in Christ. Jesus died for men, not for opinions. When I receive men upon their faith in Jesus, I acknowledge the efficacy of His work, but I need not acknowledge the validity of their reasoning.

My only creed must be Christ. Jesus is the gospel and the gospel is Jesus. The crowning truth of the gospel is that He is the Son of God and, therefore, Lord of all. If I demand that one adopt my view or explanation of a secondary matter, or surrender his own, in order to be received by me, that thing becomes my creed. Whatever one must believe or subscribe to in order to be accepted by any group is the creed of that group, and like all human creeds it is exalted to a position of prominence above the divinely-established fact that Jesus is the Messiah and God's Son. The only basis of *koinonia* is the relationship with the Son created by faith in Him. It is not orthodoxy of opinion, interpretation or explanation.

### **An Important Question**

All history and experience prove that not all men will respect their vows, covenants, pledges or commitments. In the social realm some will begin well but will turn into criminals. In the political realm there will be traitors. In the economic realm there will be crooks. In the military realm there will be deserters. There is no societal relationship composed of human beings which will not be undermined and suffer tragedy because of the irresponsible. God ordained the home and marital relationship on a covenantal basis and yet the land is strewn with the wreckage of broken homes.

The community of believers, composed of strangers and pilgrims who are men and women in the flesh, must expect that from among themselves "men will arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them." Many of the congregations during the lifetime of the apostles were faced with serious problems created by those who had known Christ but who returned to their former state to walk after the flesh. Not a few of the letters addressed to congregations and individuals were written to deal with such situations.

This gives rise to a major question. Are there grounds upon which a community of saints can openly and publicly declare that one of their number will no longer be regarded as in their company? Laying aside the unscriptural expression "withdrawal of fellowship," what are the bases for the solemn terminal act of "delivering one unto Satan"? I believe there are three specifications upon which association can be declared no longer possible, and only three. To go beyond this is to go beyond the scriptures and to substitute human caprice for divine authority. Before I deal with the three reasons it seems appropriate to discuss why these are so serious that toleration, forbearance and longsuffering can no longer be accorded to the guilty.

Faith in Jesus is the door to fellowship with the Father and the Son. This involves an acceptance or reception of Jesus as God's Anointed and Lord of the whole life. "God

hath made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). There is not one door into the relationship and another one leading out. God does not have one door marked “Entrance” and another marked “Exit.” There is only one door. If one desires to leave he simply reverses his decision. He entered by believing in Jesus, he goes out by denying Him. He was ignorant of a lot of things when he came in, he will continue to be ignorant of a lot of things until he dies. The only children God has are ignorant children, although they are ignorant about different things. Their ignorance did not keep them out of Christ and their continued ignorance will not put them out, unless it is deliberate and leads them to rebellion against Jesus.

God’s children can remain in, even with their errors and problems, so long as they are willing and eager to be under the lordship of Jesus. Their mistakes are of the head and not of the heart. The Father does not expect them all to be “straight-A” students. He never runs them off because they are imbecilic, which means weak or feeble-minded. None of them know all there is to know, most of them do not know all they could know. And that covers the entire spectrum from the preacher in the pulpit to the custodian in the broom-closet.

To renounce the lordship of Jesus and refuse longer to confess faith in Him destroys the very foundation of our relationship. God will not retain in His fellowship one who is guilty of such rebellion. No congregation of believers can be true to God and continue to receive one whom God refuses. There are two ways by which one openly shows his faith in Christ — by what he says and by what he does. He demonstrates his rejection of Jesus in the same two ways. The scriptures set forth only three grounds for the congregational dissociation from one previously accepted as one of the redeemed.

## **1. Denial of Gospel Facts**

A much better way to state this is to say, “the advocacy of doctrines which separate from God.” Such doctrines are humanly-contrived systems of philosophy which overtly or covertly deny the faith, belief of which brings one into the divine-human relationship, the sharing of the life of God, eternal life. Although many mistaken views may be held, and even expressed, these do not separate from God unless they proceed from or lead to a denial of the right of the Son to be head of the body and Lord of life.

The historical facts of the gospel are seven in number, all of them directly involved in the personality of Jesus, and the implications growing out of this magnificent concept. They are the life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, coronation and glorification of Jesus. The first five were attested by human witnesses, the last two by the Holy Spirit upon Pentecost. These facts, for which credible testimony is available, are summed up in the grandest truth to which the human mind can assent, that “Jesus is the Anointed, the Son of God.” One who believes this with all of his heart may be wrong about many things, and so long as he is in the flesh will be, but this will not destroy the relationship. It is not based upon being right about a number of things, but upon being in Christ through faith.

Paul delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander unto Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme. They had divorced themselves from faith and a good conscience and made shipwreck of their faith (1 Timothy 2:19, 20). He warned against Hymenaeus and

Philetus whose gangrenous words resulted from a grave error concerning the truth. By affirming that the resurrection was already past they destroyed the faith of others (2 Timothy 2:17, 18). John spoke of those who denied the incarnation, and referred to them as antichrists seducers and false prophets.

The term “false teacher,” which in the Greek is *didaskalos* occurs only once in the new covenant scriptures. It occurs then as a description of a certain kind of character. False teachers were those who denied the Lord that bought them, secretly brought in damnable heresies, and caused the truth to be blasphemed (2 Peter 2:1,2). Despite the sparing use of this derogatory expression, the term is frequently used today for everyone who utters anything contrary to a traditional pattern. There are those who seemingly cannot distinguish between a false teacher and mistaken brother. And they may be more dangerous than those whom they condemn. They seem never to have learned that *pseudo*, false, applies to that which is deliberately calculated and intended to deceive, mislead, and beguile, and has no reference to those who are honestly and innocently mistaken. To fill the air with “railing accusations” against such makes the railer a greater threat to the harmony of the saints than are the accused ones.

Espousal of an opinion which does not separate from God should not separate His children from each other. If God is willing to tolerate and forbear one who loves Jesus but is mistaken about some matter, we ought to be willing to do the same. Admittedly, all differences of opinion create tensions but they should not result in termination of relationship. They are not problems of fellowship, but problems in the fellowship. The fellowship is more important than a proper solution to the difficulty and must never be allowed to become secondary to it. But one who denies the facts about Jesus, essential to entrance into the fellowship with God, cannot be retained in a community founded upon affirmation of those facts.

## 2. Moral Turpitude

All facts to which testimony is given and sustained by evidence involve certain implications for the life and conduct of one who believes the testimony. It is not sufficient to give mere mental assent or pay lip-service to the testimony. One must commit himself to the object of the testimony and order his conduct in such a way as to exemplify that commitment. Faith is trust in a person or principle which impels one to surrender himself to that person or principle regardless of cost or sacrifice.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. To follow Jesus is not merely to embrace a way of life, but to share in the life of the Way. To return to a life-style utterly opposed to the moral and ethical values enunciated and exemplified by Jesus is to renounce the lordship of Jesus. It is the equivalent of saying, “I will not have this man reign over me.” It is to become a rebel, a revolutionary, a mutineer.

We must be careful at this point for it is easy to equate every lapse or every sin, regardless of circumstances, with rebellion. All sin is sin, but the motivation is not always the same. Certainly the citizens of a country like the United States are not all rebels, but all of them at some time or other break a law or violate a statute. The apostle John cautions us against saying that we have not sinned or that we have no sin.

Instead of acting like hardened and defiant rebels we are often reduced to shame and tears by our own carefree and thoughtless grieving of the Spirit.

But there are those in whom the spirit of self still reigns. Peter refers to such persons as “slaves of corruption.” He declares it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them (2 Peter 2:21). He declares that they are spots and blemishes, that they have eyes full of adultery, and they cannot cease from sin.

The life in Christ is a new life. When those in Christ dethrone Him in their hearts and deliberately choose to walk according to the course of this world, enthroning the spirit which works in the children of disobedience, they forfeit the right of association with those who are filled with the fullness of God. In 1 Corinthians 5, the action to be taken by a congregation of saints troubled with such an anarchistic spirit is clearly detailed.

That community of believers had within its confines a man who openly boasted of sexual relations with his father’s wife. It was so blatant that Paul said it was a matter of common knowledge. Such a type of carnality was not even sanctioned by the pagans. Paul used five terms to express what action the congregation should take. Such action was to be a public renunciation of the sinner and his sin. It was to be taken “when ye are gathered together.”

The saints were to deliver the guilty person unto Satan (verse 5). They were to purge out the old leaven (verse 7). They were not to company with him (verse 9). They were not to eat with him (verse 11). They were to put away from among themselves that wicked person (verse 13). There is no question about the way a community of saints must act in a case of open rebellion where the individual deliberately adopts a lifestyle which makes him “a wicked person.”

What must be realized is that not all in the body of Christ who sin are “wicked persons.” They are sinners but they are not that kind of persons. Indeed, the congregation at Corinth must have had a number who sinned. The apostle was hesitant about returning, much as he loved the brethren. He was afraid he would find “debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, and tumults (2 Cor. 12:21). But he was also afraid he would need to mourn over “many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed” (verse 22). If *many* were guilty of such deviations from the path of moral rectitude the congregation was in a sad state of affairs. Yet Paul indicated that he would “weep o’er the erring one, lift up the fallen.”

There is a danger that we will associate the term immoral only with sexual offences. Indeed, when the word is used we seem automatically to think of sexual acts. This is not justified by the facts. Actually the word immoral is applicable to anything that is discordant with ethical principles, and to the disciples of Christ this means those principles enunciated and exemplified by Jesus. Anything which is contrary to the nature attributable to the life of our Lord while in the flesh is immoral.

The apostle includes along with the fornicator, the covetous, the idolater, the railer, the drunkard and the extortioner (1 Cor. 5:11). Again it must be remembered that he is here assessing a lifestyle rather than an occasional or isolated instance of sin. It is a

matter of interest that the list generally deals with those things which are inimical to a social relationship. The fornicator appropriates for gratification of his lust the body of another. The covetous feels an inordinate desire for what belongs to another. The idolater bestows a devotion upon something which belongs to another. A railer reviles in harsh, abusive language and thus destroys the peace and dignity of another. A drunkard makes himself obnoxious by his irrationality which destroys communion with others. An extortioner obtains by force, illegality or ingenuity the property of another.

The attitude enjoined by Jesus is summed up in the admonition to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. In the community of the saints each must esteem others better than himself, in honor preferring one another. It is obvious that the body cannot exist if the members destroy one another for selfish ends. Such a course is not only inimical to the congregation but destructive of the divine purpose. Therefore, while patience is required with the weak, the unlearned and easily tempted, one who deliberately chooses to live in defiance of the divine nature no longer has any claim upon the intimate companionship and communion of those whose citizenship is in heaven.

### 3. The Factional Spirit

The third thing which renders one unfit for continuation in the company of the believers is the unbridled and stubborn sectarian spirit. The purpose, will and pleasure of God is to unite in one all things in Christ (Ephesians 1:9, 10). The Holy Spirit is dedicated to the achievement of this goal. The unity we are to maintain is the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3). The fellowship of which we are to partake is the fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14).

The sectarian spirit is opposed to the Holy Spirit. It is divisive, schismatic and separative. It is a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:20). Jude declares that those who separate themselves are sensual, having not the Spirit (verse 19). Paul instructs that an individual who exhibits the schismatic spirit should be rejected after having been given at least two admonitory warnings. He declares that one who will not heed and insists upon fragmenting the saints has turned aside from the real purpose of our calling, and persists in sinning, even while his very attitude is self-condemnatory (Titus 3:10,11)

One is not factional merely because he does not agree with the status quo. It is not sinful to entertain and even cherish an opinion which runs counter to the orthodox position. It is not wrong to express one's opinion to others in the proper spirit. None of this is schismatical or heretical. It only becomes so when one solicits adherents to his view for the purpose of building up a party to propagate and defend it, thus causing a cleavage among the saints.

What is not often recognized is that one can be factional even though his views are correct. The sectarian spirit is not related to the validity of the ideas expressed. One is not necessarily a sectarian because he is wrong, but he is wrong because he is a sectarian. His brain may be clear and his heart clouded. The sectarian spirit is a disease of the heart rather than of the mind. To try and "line up" fellow-partisans, and weld them into a cohesive unity devoted to the task of defending *some* truth to the neglect of the whole body of truth, is a sin against God's eternal purpose.

One can be sectarian and not be in a sect. All sects grow out of the sectarian spirit and the spirit precedes the sect. The sectarian spirit is always exclusivistic and it creates exclusive sects. When one regards the party with which he is affiliated as containing all of God's children to the exclusion of all others, he is sectarian. One can be in a sect and not be sectarian at all. If he recognizes that the body of Christ is greater than any sect, including the one in which he finds himself, and that it contains all of the saved upon earth, he is not a sectarian.

Obviously it is easier to give lip-service to such an ideal than it is to implement it. One may enunciate a belief that the body is made up of all the saved, but if he confines his love, affection and recognition only to those of his own sect, he is still sectarian because he allows the sectarian spirit to govern his actions.

No honest opinion held by one who is in Christ Jesus is factional or heretical. No one who holds such an opinion is a subject of admonition from others. It is not their business. They can no more tell a man what he must think than they can tell him what kind of car to drive. To tell a man that he must give up his opinion, or that he must confess it is a sin to hold it, makes those who do so the sectarians, rather than the one who entertains the opinion or deduction. Opinions are private possessions and are not subject to trespass by others, not even preachers or elders.

Only when a man sets out to gather a clan or clique composed of those who would separate themselves in order to preserve and perpetuate an opinion or deduction should he be given warning. If he persists in his divisive action he should be rejected as inimical to the unity of the Spirit. Even then, he must never be rejected because he holds a certain deduction arrived at by human judgment, but only because of his deliberate attempt to form a party around it. It is just as essential to protect the freedom of an individual to think for himself as it is to protect a congregation of saints from one who tries to think for everyone else.

"Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life ..." (Philippians 2:14-16).