

Errors Heard from Those Who Have Left the Church

Charles Pogue

Defender – July, 2021

Over the years there have been many who have abandoned the church of Christ. Some of those have left the church and gone into indifference if not total unbelief. There may be a greater number who have left and joined forces with the denominational world. There are several videos posted on YouTube by some of the people who give their excuses for leaving the body of Christ and have joined themselves to religious error. Following are a few of the ones I have heard.

They say churches of Christ claim there must be authority for everything one does in worship. It is not the churches of Christ who made that rule, God did. Colossians 3:16-17 demonstrate the mandate is set in stone. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." It is God who has said we must have authority for all we do in worship, not members of the church of Christ.

Often, those who have left the church accuse us of overemphasizing doctrine. Let them consider a truth. No one can overemphasize anything God requires of man. So far as doctrine is concerned, the New Testament warns us not to be carried about by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). In 1 Timothy 1:3, Paul reminds the younger preacher he left in Ephesus to charge some to teach no other doctrine. The apostle then lists some things contrary to sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:4-10). In Romans, Paul expresses his joy those brethren

obeyed from the heart the doctrine delivered to them (Rom. 6:17). We all are to be nourished or brought up in the words of faith and good doctrine (1 Tim. 4:6). Paul further instructed Timothy that "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13). In the oft-quoted 2 Timothy 4:2-4, Paul charged Timothy to preach the Word in season and out of season. He was to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering, and what else? Doctrine! How important is doctrine? The apostle John states it clearly. "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" (2 John 9). Sound doctrine cannot be overemphasized.

Again, those who have left the church falsely accuse brethren of minimizing God's grace. What in the world do they think teaching and preaching concerning the cross of Christ are if not maximizing the grace of God? We are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation is a gift from God. Why? Because none of us can save ourselves. We are all guilty of sin (Rom. 3:23), the wages of which is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23). We are not guilty of minimizing God's grace, but rather those who have left seem to have forgotten that the grace that brings salvation has appeared unto all men, but it does not save all men. Instead, it teaches us. God's grace teaches us how not to live and how to live (Tit. 2:11-15). How are we to live? As obedient children (1 Pet. 1:14-16). The point is grace and obedience to the doctrine of Christ cannot, they must not, be separated. Faithful members of the church are not guilty of minimizing grace. Rather, those who have left the church have decided to minimize obedience.

Concerning the matter of grace, some who have left the church claim focusing on striving for perfection puts down grace. If such be the case, the writer of Hebrews does the same thing. "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ,

let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God" (Heb. 6:1). We are all weak and erring. Yes, all of us sin, but over and over the New Testament warns us to stay away from sin and do what is right. Jesus, Himself, said not to minimize obedience. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24). Strive refers to a struggle, to contend for a prize with difficulties standing constantly in our way. Our English word agonize is a transliteration of the Greek word translated "strive" in the King James. The claim that focusing on striving for perfection puts down grace is the opinion of some, but an opinion is all it is. One wonders if such people are down on Paul who over and over, in Galatians 5, Colossians 3, and Ephesians 4, in particular, contrasts the life of the new man with the old man. Was Paul wrong to tell the Romans when one rises from the watery grave of baptism he is to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4)? Peter sums this point up well in 1 Peter 4:15-16: "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." The deserters who make this false charge against the faithful are the ones guilty of minimizing something. They minimize Scripture!

Many of those who leave the church claim it is a denomination among denominations. They tell us there are Christians scattered throughout the various churches of men. These are guilty of denying the oneness of the church. As in all the other excuses they appeal to, they ignore the Scripture. Jesus said He would (Mat. 16:18) and did (Acts 2:1...) build His church. There is only one body (Eph. 4:4) which is His church (Eph. 1:22-23). Therefore, there is only one church. The New Testament describes all things concerning that body including its worship, mission, and organization. In other words, the New Testament is the pattern for the church (Heb. 8:1-13). Paul instructed the Corinthians to speak the same things and

for there to be no divisions among them. The apostle sent Timothy to Corinth to remind them of the things Paul taught them, which were the exact same things he taught in every congregation (1 Cor. 4:17).

Those who have left the church and who now claim the church is one among many denominations need to consider Paul's writing to the Corinthians instructing both them and us to be of the same mind, to teach the same things, and for there to be no divisions among us (1 Cor. 1:10). If the deserters are right in their belief that there are Christians in the different denominations is right, and there are divisions in all of them regarding the matters Paul listed, we are all lost. If not, why not?

Departures from the unity of doctrine, practice, and manner of life are reasons the Scripture gives us the clear command to practice the withdrawal of fellowship. John wrote concerning some, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19). Many of those who went out from us have proven themselves to have never really been one of us.

From the various ones I have heard speak who left the church at some point in their lives, I have concluded three things regarding their thinking. First, they have the wrong idea that we are full of arrogance when we insist that we can absolutely know the truth. What an attack that makes against Jesus Himself, Who said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth, shall make you free" (John 8:32).

The second thing is they have abandoned the necessity of being obedient in all things. Their condition is sad in that Paul wrote, "For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things (2 Cor. 2:9).

Third, they seem to have bought into the popular Calvinist error of once saved always saved. If so, they need to return to the Scriptures and meditate on passages such as 2 Peter 2:20: “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.”

Jesus died for and built one church, His church. He did not die for the denominations of men, the various community churches popping up all over the country, nor for those in the various world religions who do not honor the God of the Bible nor esteem Jesus as His only begotten Son. No one outside the church of Christ will be saved regardless of whether they have never been members of it or if they have gone out from us.

Call Upon the Name of the Lord

Brad Green

Beacon – August 4th, 2014

Our loving and merciful God wants “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Since God desires that all men be saved, He provides for us His plan to save man (Rom. 1:16-17). How comforting it is to know that God loves us and sent His only begotten Son into the world that through Him we might be saved (John 3:16-17). It is also extremely comforting to know that we can know what God requires of us regarding salvation (John 8:31-32).

The Bible teaches that, “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13). What does it mean to

“call upon the name of the Lord”? Many have defined calling on the name of the Lord as a prayer for salvation and for Jesus to come and abide in one’s heart. However, this definition contradicts the words of Jesus who said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 7:21). Any interpretation of a verse in the Bible that contradicts another verse is, of necessity, deemed to be false. The inspired James writes, “be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves...Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (Jam. 1:22; 2:17). Additionally, there is no example anywhere in the New Testament of an individual praying for salvation. Therefore, calling upon the name of the Lord does not refer to a prayer or to any spoken act.

It is important to understand how to “call upon the name of the Lord” since it is necessary for salvation. To understand the meaning, we must study the statement in the context of the book and chapter in which it is found as well as the whole of the New Testament. In the immediate context, we find that there are prerequisites to calling upon the name of the Lord—Romans 10:14-15 teaches that one must hear and believe. Also, in the immediate context, verse 16 in particular, we find a phrase that is used in substitute for “calling upon the name of the Lord.” The inspired writer uses “obeyed the gospel” interchangeably with “call upon the name of the Lord.” To be saved, one must obey the Gospel of Christ—i.e., “call upon the name of the Lord.”

The apostle Paul further defines what it means to call upon the name of the Lord when he recalls the words spoken to him by Ananias, “arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Here, calling on the name of the Lord is defined as arising and being baptized to have one’s sins washed away. This is in harmony with Paul’s letter to the Romans seeing that Paul told them:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

It is also in harmony with the first Gospel sermon recorded in Acts 2. Peter and the other apostles preached, "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). Later, when the audience was convinced of their sins and asked what they must do to be forgiven and thus saved, "Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). The New Testament teaches that, following faith (Heb. 11:6), repentance (Luke 13:3), and confessing that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 8:37), baptism is the culminating act of God's plan to save man (Mat. 28:19-20).

The act of calling upon the name of the Lord is inseparable from obedience to the Gospel of Christ and baptism. The Gospel of Christ "is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16) and obeying the Gospel is used interchangeably with calling upon the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:13, 16). Being baptized is an act of obedience commanded by the Gospel of Christ and is eternally connected to calling upon the name of the Lord by God, Himself, in such verses as Acts 2:21, 38 and 22:16. The Gospel is God's power unto salvation and baptism is the act at which the Bible teaches one is saved from past sins. According to the apostle Peter, "baptism doth also now save us" (1 Pet. 3:21) and Jesus proclaims, "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:16).

Calling upon the name of the Lord, therefore, is not something that is spoken; it is an act of humility and submission to the Word of God in simple obedience. Those who obey God's plan of salvation, which culminates with water baptism, and remain faithful to God's Word until they depart this life (Rev. 2:10)

are they who are calling upon the name of the Lord and will be saved.

Lenoir City, TN

Thou Shalt Worship the Lord Thy God Matthew 4:10

Thomas F. Eaves Sr.

February 2014

What Is Worship?

Poetically, worship has been defined as “Man climbing the altar stairs to God.” The dictionary defines worship as: “Worthiness, repute, respect, reverence paid to a divine being.” Others have defined worship as: “Profound respect mingled with fear and affection; veneration. A token of respect or veneration; an obeisance.”

In the New Testament the most common word translated worship is *proskuneo* which has the basic meaning of “to kiss toward.” It appears sixty times and is defined as follows: “to do obeisance to, to prostrate oneself, do reverence to.”

Acceptable Worship Involves a Conscious Effort

Worship is not an act that one engages in accidentally, neither is it a spectator activity, rather it is an activity in which the worshiper puts forth a conscious effort to accomplish God’s will. Moses writes the account of Cain and

Able worshiping God (Gen. 4:3-4). He wrote that God had respect for Abel's offering but no respect for Cain's. The Hebrews writer tells us: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Heb. 11:4). Abel's sacrifice was by faith and since faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), Abel made a conscious effort and followed God's instructions.

When Abraham was obeying God's instructions concerning Isaac (Gen. 22:2; cf. Gen. 22:11-12; Heb. 11:17-18), he told his young men: "Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (Gen. 22:5). Abraham made a conscious effort to go to the place designated by God for the purpose of worshiping. God's children also assemble at designated places for the purpose of worshiping Him.

Jesus, in conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, instructed her that under the Jewish law Jerusalem was the proper place to worship (John 4:20-22). The Ethiopian eunuch traveled from his homeland to Jerusalem for the purpose of worshiping (Acts 8:28).

Acceptable Worship Involves Several Characteristics

Obedience—In the days of Malachi the prophet the priests were accused of despising the name of Jehovah because they were not following God's instructions concerning sacrifices. Instead of offering Jehovah sacrifices which met His specifications, they were offering polluted bread, blind, lame, and sick animals (Mal. 1:6-8). Because of this disobedience their sacrifices were rejected. In the New Testament, Jesus declared that worship was to be in spirit (from the heart) and truth (John 4:24). To worship in truth is to worship according to God's instructions (John 17:17).

Attitude—Jesus spoke a parable to certain men who trusted in themselves (not God) that they were righteous and set all others at nought (Luke 18:9). A Pharisee and a Publican (tax collector) went up to worship (pray). The Pharisee's worship was rejected because of his ungodly attitude. The Publican's worship was accepted because he worshiped with an acceptable attitude (Luke 18:9-14).

A Pure Life—God told the Jews in the time of Amos that He despised their worship and emphatically told them that He would not accept it. The reason? The Jews were walking in disobedience to God's Word (Amos 5:21-24). Jehovah spoke to the Jews through Isaiah and told them that He considered their worship as nothing more than trampling His courts and that He would hide His eyes from them (Isa. 1:11-17). The reason Jehovah would not accept their worship is vividly described earlier in the same chapter (Isa. 1:2-9). Christians are to offer their spiritual sacrifices as **holy** priests (1 Pet. 2:5).

Pure worship cannot come from an impure life.

Five Types of Worship

God's Word informs us that there are five types of worship which man can engage in but only one is acceptable to God.

1. False worship—(Jer. 19:5). Israel's worship to Baal was false worship and an abomination unto God.
2. Ignorant worship (Acts 17:23).
3. Will worship—(Col. 2:18-23, especially v. 23).
4. Vain worship—(Mat. 15:7-9).
5. True worship—(John 4:23).

This is the only one that God will accept. Worship is an opportunity of a lifetime. May God help us to worship Him in spirit and truth, that He may be glorified and that we as Christians may benefit from the fellowship with Him and our fellow Christians.

Worship God's Way!

Bruce Stulting

Beacon – July 6, 2009

In the first century, the church worshiped according to the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). Jesus said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). He also promised the apostles that

when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come (John 16:13).

Therefore, the apostles' doctrine is in complete harmony with the will of the Lord.

It is imperative that we continue to worship according to the New Testament pattern. Failure to do so renders our worship vain (Mat. 15:9). We read how

Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord (Lev. 10:1-2).

This example admonishes us not to substitute our desires in place of God's commands.

New Testament worship was always carried out with reverence

and in an orderly manner (1 Cor. 14:30). The order of the worship is usually determined beforehand by the elders. Godly men take the lead in the assembly and direct us in the various acts of worship. These men often briefly explain the item of worship in order to help us better prepare our minds to worship God. Extremism in worship is to be avoided. Ritualism or emotionalism should never characterize our worship. Today, many "new innovations" such as choirs, swaying with upraised hands, spontaneous singing, and hand clapping are being added to the worship. However, a casual reading of the New Testament will find that these acts are not authorized in worship.

Authorized worship includes the Lord's Supper, giving, singing, prayer, and teaching the Gospel. We dare not try to alter, substitute, add to or take away from the worship that God has authorized. As Christians, we are satisfied to worship God in the way that pleases Him. Any change on our part would be presumptuous and sinful.

During the singing, all members of the congregation are to join their voices together in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. In doing so, we not only praise God but also teach and admonish one another as well (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). With the specific command to "sing" addressed to the individual, we do not add mechanical instruments of music in our worship songs. For the same reason, we do not have choirs, solos, or any type of mood music for entertainment.

During worship on the first day of the week, Christians are to give liberally as God has prospered them (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Our liberality in giving is evidence of our devotion to God (2 Cor. 8:1-8). Although there are many factors to determine the amount given, our money must always be given freely (2 Cor. 9:6-7). Guests are not required to give, but they may do so if they choose. The funds collected are used in the work of the church which includes evangelism, benevolence, and edification.

A vital part of any Christian's life is prayer. Through prayer the Christian gains strength, offers thanksgiving to God, makes requests, and intercedes on the behalf of others (1 Pet. 5:8; Phil. 4:6). When Christians come together to worship, prayers are offered frequently. During times of prayer, a godly man speaks his prayer out loud with the rest of the congregation following him in silence (1 Tim. 2:8). Praying in this fashion allows us to maintain order, reverence, and avoid noise and confusion.

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus as a memorial of His death on the cross (Mat. 26:26-29). The unleavened bread and fruit of the vine are emblems which represent our Savior's body and blood and help us to center our minds on the events of His death. In partaking of the Lord's Supper we have communion (fellowship) with Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). In Acts 20:7 we have the example of the first century church partaking of the Lord's Supper on the first day of each week. We do not practice closed communion, but each person must examine himself that he may partake in a worthy manner (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Guests are not encouraged or forbidden to partake; it is their choice. We must, however, point out that there can be no communion or fellowship with Christ unless we are faithful children of God (1 John 1:5-7).

Teaching is also part of our worship. The Bible is the inspired, authoritative, and all sufficient Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). As such, we believe that if a man speaks it should be from the Word of God (1 Pet. 4:11). Therefore, our Bible class teachers usually teach directly out of the Bible. Sermons from the pulpit will be Bible centered with Scriptures given to enable the listener to check the Bible for oneself (Acts 17:11; John 5:39). At the close of each sermon an invitation will be given. This is an opportunity for the believing sinner to be reconciled to God by obeying the Gospel. This is done by repenting of sins, confessing Christ, and being baptized for the remission of sins (John 8:24; Luke

13:3; Mat. 10:32; Acts 2:38). The erring Christian also has the opportunity to repent and ask for the prayers of the congregation (Acts 8:22).

The foregoing is a brief account of New Testament worship. From the time of the apostles, men have sought to improve upon the Divine pattern. All attempts to do so end in failure and sin. Let us stick with the pattern and worship God "in spirit and in truth." We encourage all to accept the teaching of the New Testament and "Worship God's Way!"

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The Glorious Gospel of Christ

The Glorious Gospel of Christ
Danny Douglas

Gospel is translated from the Greek euangelion, and it means: "glad or joyful tidings, good message, good news." Indeed, the Gospel is good news (Rom. 10:15). It is the God-given duty of the Lord's church to proclaim it to a lost and dying world (Mark 16:15-16). And, as wonderful as the Gospel is, the soul who refuses to obey it will not be saved, but eternally destroyed (2 Thes. 1:7-9). Now, let us consider why it is such good news, and why it is so urgent for us to obey and teach it.

"As cold waters to a thirsty soul, So is good news from a far country" (Prov. 25:25). The good news of God, the Gospel, was brought down from heaven to earth by the Holy Spirit (1 Pet. 1:12). Inspired men have recorded this message for us in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15-17). Man is lost and condemned without the Gospel (Rom. 1:16). To downcast man, lost in sin,

hungering and thirsting for salvation—the Gospel has come! If we really appreciated the Gospel of Christ, then we will be willing to: (a) suffer for it, like Paul (2 Tim. 1:8-9); (b) sacrifice for its proclamation, and realize that carnal things are very small in comparison to the spiritual blessings brought forth by the preaching and teaching of the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:11-18; Eph. 1:3-7; 3:8); (c) “be fellowhelpers to the truth” (3 John 8); (d) be “fellowlabourers” in the Gospel (Phil. 1:17); (f) spread the Gospel message ourselves (Acts 8:4; Prov. 11:30); (g) help others to be trained to preach and teach it (2 Tim. 2:2). *In the Lord’s church today, we urgently need to have a greater love and devotion to the “glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim. 1:11), which is the “glorious gospel of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4).*

Why Is the Gospel Such Good News?

1. *The Gospel is good news because it tells man of the Savior who came to earth to save him (Luke 2:10-12; 19:10). As the song says: “Why Did My Savior Come To Earth...Because He Loves Me So” (1 John 4:8-10; Phil. 2:5-11; Rom. 5:6-11; Rev. 1:5). In the Gospel we learn about: “the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20b). A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord.*

The Gospel announces: “how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Man, under the condemnation of sin, has a Savior who loves him, and who shed his precious blood to save him and wash away his sins (Mat. 1:21; Rev. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:19). Man does not have to be lost in hell (Rom. 5:8-9). Now that is truly good news!

2. *The Gospel is for all people (Rom. 1:16; Acts 15:7). Jesus commanded His disciples: “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). Indeed, Christ “by the grace of God”*

tasted death "for every man" (Heb. 2:9).

3. *The Gospel is good news because it is the "gospel of the grace of God"* (Acts 20:24). "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us" (cf. Tit. 2:11-12). Because of God's grace, man has the privilege of being taught the Gospel of Christ. Moreover, the Gospel is the message of God's grace, and the grace of God has made the Gospel possible. By it we have access to God's grace (Tit. 2:11-12; Eph. 2:8; Rom. 5:1-2; 10:17; Tit. 3:4-7; 1 Cor. 15:1).

4. *The Gospel is good news because by it we are begotten by God—we become His children* (1 Cor. 4:15; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23). When one obeys the Gospel of Christ, he is begotten by God and born into His house, the church of Christ—the kingdom of God (1 Tim. 3:15; John 3:3-5; Col. 1:13-14). As physical children are begotten by their fathers, God's children have been begotten by His seed, the Word of God (Luke 8:11; 1 Pet. 1:23). What a privilege to be a child of God (John 1:12-13)! "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not" (1 John 3:1).

5. *The Gospel is of God. It is the "gospel of God"* (Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thes. 2:2, 8-9; 1 Pet. 4:17). It is from God—not men! Inspired men received it from God; they did not receive it from man (Gal. 1:11-12; 1 Cor. 2:6-16). Unlike the teachings and inventions of man, it is perfect and eternal (Eph. 1:13; John 8:32; Tit. 1:14; Mat. 15:9; 15:13; 2 John 9; 1 Pet. 1:25; Rev. 14:6). "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thes. 2:13).

6. *Christ's Gospel is good news because it tells man of heaven and makes the hope of heaven possible* (Col. 1:5). Yet, we must be steadfast and faithful, and be not moved away from the Gospel hope if we are to reach Heaven.

We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel... And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister (Col. 1:3-5, 21-23).

7. *The Gospel of Christ brings peace. It is the "gospel of peace"* (Eph. 6:15; Rom. 10:15). By the Gospel, God has made peace between Jew and Gentile, and between Himself and man (cf. Eph. 2:11-22). Because of the Gospel, man is able to have his sins remitted by the blood of Christ, and therefore have access to God the Father (Eph. 2:13-18). "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). By the Gospel "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1), which the world cannot provide! (John 14:27; 16:33).

8. *We are called unto God by the Gospel, and by it we are able to obtain "the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Thes. 2:14). "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). Thus, the Gospel is the only means by which God calls men to Him. Thus, we can understand why God wants all men to hear the Gospel of Christ (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). What are we doing about it?

9. *The Gospel of Christ is good news because it is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek"* (Rom. 1:16; cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-2). Our "Saviour Jesus Christ...hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10), "the gospel of your salvation" (Eph. 1:13). It informs man that to be saved, he must: hear and believe the Gospel (Acts 2:38; 15:7; Rom.

10:14-17); repent (Acts 2:38; 17:30); confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10); and be baptized in His name for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Having put on Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-4), one must remain faithful (Rev. 2:10; John 8:31-32; 14:15, 21-24; 1 John 1:7). The sacrifice of Christ has made Gospel preaching possible (1 Cor. 1:18-25; 2:2; Eph. 2:13; 3:8)! How great it is!

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How Good and How Pleasant it Is for Brethren to Dwell Together in Unity!

Tim Smith
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“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore” (Psa. 133:1-3).

A study of the biblical subject of Unity is ever a timely one, and now is no less the case. There is now, and there always has been since shortly after the beginning of the church, much division within the ranks of those who purport to be followers of Jesus Christ. The Psalmist declared that it is a good and pleasant thing when brethren are united, but is this always

the case? Is there any set of circumstances wherein unity is not good? Biblically speaking, the answer is yes. Let us take a few minutes to consider these matters.

Unity is Shared Between Brethren

As the Psalmist declared, unity is a family thing. We enjoy unity with each other based on our kinship with each other, and that kinship is based on our relationship with the Lord. We are brethren with each other because God is our Father. The point at hand is well illustrated in Paul's dealings with the brethren in Corinth. He had condemned extending fellowship to "fornicators...covetous...idolaters" and the like (1 Cor. 5:9-10). That he was dealing with a family relationship was punctuated in verse 11: "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." Clearly the point is that we do not "keep company with" (fellowship) those of this world in a spiritual sense. We do not have family responsibilities to those not in the family of God. Hear Paul again: "For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth" (1 Cor. 5:12-13). We have family duties toward those in the family of God, no more, no less, and none else.

Unity Between Brethren Is Predicated Upon the Brethren Respecting the Principles of Truth

We are granted salvation upon proper immersion (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21), and we are granted entrance into the body of Christ at the same time (Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Cor. 12:13). But to maintain our salvation and our good standing in the body of

Christ we are obligated to be faithful and true to the truth which saved us (James 1:21). Should we, in the course of time, leave the truth and replace it in our lives with error, what happens? Consider the case of the Thessalonians: "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thes. 2:10-12). The sin under consideration in this passage warranted the ones guilty of it to be "damned," but what was it? Murder? Extortion? Perversion? No, it was their lack of love for and submission to the truth. When they left the truth, they left their salvation. What was to be done with them? Were they to continue to enjoy the benefits of the family relationship afforded them in Christ? Hear the same inspired writer in the next chapter: "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 he received of us... 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. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thes. 3:6, 14-15). This man who left the truth lost his privileges as a member of the family of God and was to be "withdrawn from" by the faithful. He was no longer in "good standing" with God, and Paul demanded that the church recognize that fact. We may not, with the approval of God, enjoy unity with those who have left the truth.

The Prayer of Our Lord for Unity

Our Lord prayed that his followers might be united, and in this wonderful prayer He linked unity with acceptance of the Word of God. Hear him: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in

thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:20-21). Notice that the unity for which he prayed was linked with the acceptance of (belief in) the Word of Christ as revealed through the apostles. To this Paul adds: "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" (1 Cor. 1:10). To do our part in answering the prayer of our Lord for unity and in obeying the command of the Lord through Paul, we must believe in and obey the truth.

It truly is a "good and pleasant" thing for "brethren to dwell together in unity," but it is only brethren who are so to dwell, and specifically brethren who are faithful and true to the principles of truth. All others are excluded from this relationship. We love the lost, whether they be lost as unfaithful Christians or as alien sinners; but our love for them is demonstrated by teaching them the truth; not extending fellowship to and dwelling in unity with them in their sin.

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