

The Grace of God



"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us..." (Titus 2:11-12).

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Watching Silently As The Wolves Devour The Sheep

Edited

It is very painful to announce the withdrawal of fellowship. Few things are more agonizing than witnessing souls cleansed by the blood of Christ return to the mire and slavery of sin (2 Peter 2:22; Rom. 6:16).

Religious fellowship is a condition of life that has been hijacked by the sectarian world. To them, fellowship means entertainment, food and play. But to the child of God, fellowship is spiritual. It is based upon walking together in truth, a unity of blessing and purpose (Ps. 133:1, Gal. 2:9). It encourages the support of evangelism (Phil. 4:15) & the sharing of both joy & pain (Gal. 6:1-2, 1 Cor. 12:26). Fellowship is not confined to a single room or event but transcends space and time to connect those of like faith wherever they are and at all times (2 Peter 1:1 & 1 Thess. 4:9-10).

Clearly, the extension of fellowship is joyous, while the severance of fellowship is filled with sorrow. Those in the sectarian world who are dissatisfied with the fact that sin breaks fellowship have produced the ecumenical or unity movement. This movement **ignores** a mountain of doctrinal differences in the pursuit of a supposed peace. While churches of Christ express public disdain for "unity-in-diversity", the last 25 years have produced a number of doctrines meant to achieve a similar end, if only on a smaller scale. Many are looking for a means to continue fellowship within the body of Christ with those living in sin or those advocating greater tolerance of sin.

Vehicle of the Day: Romans 14

Romans 14 has become the hobby of those striving to bridge the fellowship gap that separates us from brethren living in or advocating error. Although the entire New Testament paints sin as ugly and due exposure and rebuke (Eph. 5:11, Titus 2:15), it is being taught that Romans 14 softens that message & permits the tolerance of worldliness & doctrinal diversity.

In this time of great peril, the kingdom of God needs her preachers & elders to lift up their voices in opposition to error (1 Peter 4:11). But the plea for greater tolerance has so infected the body with its leaven (1 Cor. 5:2, 6),

that many evangelists and elders have chosen to be silent & thereby allow the wolves to devour Christ's sheep. Romans 14 deals with matters God described as pure & good (v. 14, 16). A decision to participate in these things is acceptable to God, as is the decision to abstain (v. 3). To put matters of immorality or doctrinal error under this blanket of acceptance is to do damage to the Holy Spirit's masterpiece & to invite blemish upon the body of Christ. This is the devil's objective, not ours. We should, therefore, be lifting up our voices in opposition to any doctrine that serves to increase sin, whether intentionally or not.

Should We Isolate Ourselves?

How we deal with error and false teaching is an important consideration. Many preachers and elders are operating on a "See no evil; hear no evil; speak no evil" precept. These brethren are praying that what they don't know can't hurt them. If only the devil were so considerate! Rather, the Devil exploits those with their heads buried in the sand (Acts 3:17). Those who suffer the laryngitis of cowardice (Rev. 21:8) when faced with error regrettably are very vocal in discouraging others from taking a bold stand for Truth. The only banner some are willing to run up the flag pole is a white flag of surrender with the slogan, "Positive Mental Attitude."

For example, many have chosen to ignore the current controversy over divorce and remarriage, turning a blind eye to the false teacher and a deaf ear to the warnings about him. Men have crossed their fingers and are hoping that his doctrine won't walk through the front door one day. And it probably won't, for false teaching tends to seep under that door like sludge. *"For certain men have crept in unnoticed ... who turn the grace of God into lewdness"* (Jude 4). *"For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women"* (11 Tim. 3:6).

A failure to watch and cry out like Ezekiel results in the spirits of men being misled. Proverbs tells us that *"A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment"* (18:1). Surely, no man should go looking for fights (Prov. 26:17); but when the faith is assaulted by error, *"Is there not a cause"* to stand like a man and contend earnestly (1 Sam. 17:2, Jude 3)?

The problem with isolationism is that it is a decision of convenience and is alterable when it suits the man. Those who silently stand by while wolves devour the flock will on the other hand gladly sell Bible class materials, hold gospel meetings all over the country, write for journals, etc. For whatever motivation, the isolation is incomplete. It is an impregnable fortress when unpleasant duty calls but is quickly discarded when the prospects become more palatable.

While we are studying Romans 14 and debating about whether there is a problem to even warn about, it might be wise to remember the command of Romans 16:17-18.

Isolationism is a fantasy, an illusion. You can never isolate yourself from responsibility & from having influence on the souls around you. Even simple inaction is a green light to error. So, what influence will you have? Where is the Isaiah to cry "Enough!" (1:11)? Where is the Jeremiah to expose that peace wrought by ignorance & unity-in-diversity is false & offensive (6:14)? Where is Ezekiel to preach the word no matter the consequences (2:5)?

We have come to a time in which the false teacher has gained victim status and all the protections that are accorded to this lofty designation. He cannot be named, his doctrines cannot be exposed, to do so is to "harass" him & he cannot be called to answer. If you ask him a question, he may hide behind a misapplication of church autonomy and a company of sympathizers, who do not agree with his doctrine (yet), but who will defend him to the point of tears. All the while the blind teacher is permitted to lead the blind student into the ditch (Matt. 15:14) and no one can be found to intercede.

The same Bible that tells us to be meek, gentle & forbearing tells us also to expose error and those who practice / promote it (1 Thess. 5:21, 1 John 4:1-3). It is easy to see why the one side of God's command is loved and the other side is avoided like the plague.

Vigilance Is Our Best Response

While the wolves are running rampant, the shepherds of the churches of Christ are challenged all the more to watch the sheep in their charge and scan the horizon for predators (1 Peter 5:2-3). The Hebrew writer promised the precious sheep of God that elders would watch out for souls (Heb. 13:17). Elders, will you? He also warned that you, shepherds, would be called to give an account of your service. You are stewards and it is required that you be found faithful to the duties of your office (1 Cor. 4:2 and 1 Tim. 3:5). Letting the wolves invade the fold before you even consider stepping in their way is a dereliction of duty. Your spiritual vision must be keen and unimpaired by sinful habit (Matt. 7:1-5). It must be sharpened by careful study and aware of the need for both exhortation and conviction (Titus 1:9).

You preachers must also be watchmen as God ordained (2 Tim. 4:5, 1 Thess. 5:14). Your occupation involves staring down the penetrating eye of error, uncowed by the sharp teeth of false doctrine. The mouths of the insubordinate to Christ, the idle talker and the deceiver must be stopped lest they subvert whole households (Titus 1:10-11).

In Christ, we are blessed with unmatched liberty, a freedom from the mastery of Satan and the just consequence of our sins (Rom. 6:22; Gal. 5:1). Liberty should not be confused with license to indulge the flesh (Gal. 5:11). We drift into that devil's bone yard when we

forget that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance & the courage to cry out when danger threatens.

The apostle Paul instituted a practice in his first century epistles that has fallen into disdain today. He exposed the false teacher & the false teaching. There were many errant doctrines in Paul's day, including the Judaizing and Gnostic taints of Christianity. Some were even teaching that the resurrection had already passed. "*Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth,*" he wrote to Timothy (2 Tim. 2:17). Paul's motivation for marking the men who taught error is revealed in verses 17-18: their false doctrine had the potential to spread unchecked like cancer and overthrow the faith of precious souls.

Paul named the wolves that the sheep might not be harmed (Acts 20:29). Some object to exposing error and identifying false teachers, finding it distasteful and even unchristian. I suppose they would have sympathized with Hymenaeus and Philetus and held Paul in contempt for his candor.

Conclusion

This is a plea for elders to actually pastor the flock that is among them. That involves keeping an eye out for false teachings that slink in. This is a plea for preachers to mark and expose error by the gospel light (Eph. 5:11), so that precious souls are not so easily destroyed by the tempter. And this is a plea for brethren to encourage and support those who will stand for the Truth. For if we do not support them, then we (by our silence) give encouragement to those who oppose Truth. Remember, even Moses needed his hands held up (Ex. 17:11-12).

PEOPLE TO REMEMBER & PRAY FOR

Sawyer Sims, Jean Gambrell (back), Johanna Fletcher, Othena Kinnard (Returned to Nashville), Wesley Geer, Mag Bumbalough, Mary Cox (Recovering from surgery), Monie Petty, Dave Poteet (NHC 230), Marilyn Poteet-Langford (Home), Betty England, Joe Smith, Thelma Klein, Nathan Hill, DeLeesa Price, Michelle Austin, Lydia Poe, Larry Bumbalough, Jake Hale, Joshua & Misty Poteet, Ed & Carolyn Williams, Kenley Streeval, Matthew Taylor (leukemia), Joyce Simmons Wagner, Lorene Myers (Rece's Grandmother).

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Radio Program** - Every Sun. 2pm, AM 1050 WSMT
- **Home Bible Study** - Sat. Nov. 24
- **Ladies Class** - 2nd & Last Sunday Each Month
- **Business Meeting** - Sun. Nov. 25
- **GM** - Ron Daly, April 2008.
- **GM** - Lanny Smith, Oct.12-17, 2008.

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