



Seek The Old Paths

“Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths. . . and walk therein”
(Jeremiah 6:16)

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CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

James W. Boyd

Jude was compelled to write with diligence to deal with false brethren. There is no hesitation or apology in his words about false teaching and false teachers.

You should begin this lesson by reading Jude from your own Bible then return to our comments. It is one short chapter. But your understanding of it is vital to this discussion. It would be profitable to discuss the entire chapter verse by verse. But our focus centers on verse three, *“...and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”* Here we have a description of THE FAITH. Literally the text tells us “to contend earnestly for the once-for-all-delivered-to-the-saints faith.” While writing this epistle on salvation, the Holy Spirit led Jude to include these words about contending for THE FAITH. There are reasons for this. There will always be those who will contend against it. The text shows us God’s recognition of false teachers, false brethren, false doctrines, and the dangers of such to the souls of men everywhere — even the church of Christ. God knows what will happen to the church when error is left unchecked and proponents of error are allowed to go without challenge to their false doctrines.

FALSE TEACHERS

False teachers are described in several ways in this one chapter book. There are those who crept in (v.4) — religious creeps. They are ungodly men (v.4), filthy dreamers, fleshly, despising

God’s authority (v.8). Jude calls them brute beasts (v.10). They are like Cain, going to have their own way; like Balaam, the Old Testament compromiser who led Israel to sin; like Korah, leader of rebellion against Moses, Aaron, and the authority of God (v.11). They are spots, clouds without water, trees with dead fruit (v.12). Verse thirteen pictures them as raging waves foaming in shame, and wandering stars in the blackness of darkness. They are murmurers, complainers, and mockers (v.18). God’s attitude toward such people is clear. Verse five says they shall be destroyed as unbelievers. Everlasting chains under darkness are reserved for them (v.6). Like Sodom and Gomorrah, they will suffer the vengeance of eternal fire (v.7).

Knowing the danger of such people, having a love for brethren, Jude was compelled to write with diligence to deal with false brethren, and deal with them he does. There is no hesitation or apology in his words about false teaching and false teachers. He wrote with clarity, definiteness, and decisiveness. There is nothing vague or ambiguous in his words. Notice verse three in detail.

THE FAITH

There is such a thing as THE FAITH. Paul said in Ephesians 4:4, *“There is one faith.”* How that differs with denominationalism that contends

not for THE FAITH, but for many faiths, leaving it to man to choose the faith of his choice! THE FAITH is the plain, simple, powerful New Testament Gospel revelation, the truth, the doctrine of Christ, the Word of God. When Paul was in Paphos and met Sergius Paulus he encountered Elymas the sorcerer who sought to *“turn the deputy away from the faith”* (Acts 13:8). The deputy was a prudent man. Elymas resisted the teaching of Paul and tried to prevent the acceptance of the system of salvation — that body of doctrine of God’s plan for saving man.

In Acts 14:22, Paul exhorted brethren to *“continue in the faith.”* From Acts 15:9 we learn the hearts of the Gentiles, like all others, are purified by “the faith.” The Greek includes the indefinite article “the.” Galatians 3:23, *“But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed.”* The faith refers to the Gospel system. This is not just belief, but has reference to the religion of which Christ is author and founder. Paul continued to write *what* we are, namely, children of God. He tells us *where* we are, namely, in Christ. He tells us *how we got there*, namely, being baptized into Christ. This is the message of THE FAITH, God’s

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Contending For The Faith...



Editorial...

THE UNITY CHRIST DEMANDS #2

Garland M. Robinson

GOD'S FIVE-FOLD PLAN FOR UNITY

When division and controversy reared its ugly head in the church at Corinth, Paul, by inspiration, took up his pen and decisively dealt with it and gave heaven's word on the subject. First Corinthians 1:10 sums up God's plan for unity better than any other verse I know. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye

- 1) all speak the same thing, and that
- 2) there be no divisions among you; but that ye
- 3) be perfectly joined together in
- 4) the same mind and in
- 5) the same judgment."

If those who desire to be pleasing unto the Lord and go to heaven when they die will all speak the same thing, there will be no divisions among them. They will be perfectly joined together which will lead them to have the same mind, which in turn, will cause them to have the same judgment. Though men say this can't be done, God says otherwise! He not only says it, He demands it. With all the division in the church at Corinth, an inspired apostle rebukes and exhorts them to have unity among themselves and then tells them how to have it. Follow God's Word! That's simple enough, but men are not willing to do it. They have their own ideas!

There are many ecumenical movements today, each claiming to be working toward unity. There are community-wide, so-called non-denominational worship services wherein many denominations come together under the banner of laying aside their doctrines and prejudices to accept one another "just as they are." However, according to the Scriptures, these are not attempts at God-approved unity. They do nothing more than "agree to disagree." They may claim they have achieved unity, but it is nothing more than union. You may tie two cats tails together and make a union, but it

sure won't make them be in unity!

Unity is not "union." Unity is not "diversity" or "agreeing to disagree." Unity is not "going along to get along" or "turning one's back on and ignoring our differences." Unity is not "ecumenical cooperation." Unity involves oneness, singleness, truth, and harmony that is based on God's Word and humbly submitting to Him. It is being of one mind (1 Peter 3:8) — the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5-8).

There are only two kinds of unity wherein people may be in complete religious agreement and harmony with each other: 1) one approved of God, and 2) one not approved of God.

There can be unity among people or groups that is not approved of God because it's not in accordance with God's will; and, consequently, though they be in unity with each other, there is no unity with the Lord. Just because some come together and agree to be at peace with one another does not mean they meet God's approval.

The second type of unity is that which is approved of God because it is in accordance with God's will; therefore, there is unity not only among people but unity with the Lord as well. True unity, God-approved unity, is based on God's Word and adhere's to the New Testament pattern. Otherwise, it is of no value at all and is not true unity.

FELLOWSHIP AND UNITY

In the New Testament we read of Christians being: *fellowcitizens* (Eph. 2:19), *fellowsoldiers* (Philemon 2), *fellowservants* (Col. 1:7), *fellowhelpers* (2 Cor. 8:23), *fellowdisciples* (John 11:16), *fellowprisoners* (Col. 4:10), *fellowworkers* (Col. 4:11), *fellowlaborers* (1 Thess. 3:2) and *fellowheirs* (Eph. 3:6). In these terms we find the idea of sharing, cooperating, communing, harmony. This is only possible when there is unity with one another and with God. Many have fellowship with one another but that does not mean

it is God-approved. We not only must have fellowship with one another, but our fellowship must be with God as well (cf. 1 John 1:3-7).

When unity prevails we have been called into the *fellowship of God's Son* (1 Cor. 1:9). We have *fellowship in ministering to the saints* (2 Cor. 8:4). If there is unity, we are able to extend our beloved brethren the *right hand of fellowship* (Gal. 2:9). Only then can we have *fellowship in the Gospel* (Phil. 1:5) and the *fellowship of the Spirit* (Phil. 2:1). As we live by the faith of Christ, we are able to "...know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:10).

ONE CHURCH

The Bible authorizes and reveals only one church. Daniel 2, Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 all speak of one kingdom/church. Jesus spoke of only one kingdom/church. To the apostles he said "...I will build my **church**...and I will give unto thee the keys of the **kingdom**" (Matt. 16:18-19). How many churches/kingdoms did He say He would build? He said "my church" — one. He did not say "my churches" — many.

The apostles revealed only one church. There is "*one body...one faith*" (Eph. 4:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:13). Paul did not teach there were many bodies and many faiths. The one body is the one church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). The one faith is the one system of faith, the Gospel by which the church is governed (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jude 3; John 12:48).

No one can find more than one church, one body, one faith in the New Testament. Jesus is the one head of the one church which is His body (Eph. 1:22-23). He does not have "many bodies" any more than He has "many heads."

THE RESTORATION PLEA

In the New Testament we read of only one church. All those who became Christians were added by the Lord into His one body, the church of Christ (Acts 2:41,47). Even during the time of the apostles, men began to corrupt the teaching of Christ (2 Thess. 2:7). This apostasy from the one true faith/church was prophesied to occur

(Acts 20:28-31; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; 2 Peter 2:1-2). It first became apparent within the leadership of the church. By 606 A.D. the first Pope was recognized as the head of the church in Rome. Ignorance of the Scriptures reigned supreme for centuries until the period of the Renaissance when a renewed interest in the Bible was stirred. As the common people began to read the Bible they soon began what is known as the *Reformation Movement*. Men such as Martin Luther sought to reform the Catholic Church and bring it closer to the first century church. Others also joined in and from these efforts arose the Presbyterian Church in 1536, the Church of England in 1552, the Baptist Church in 1611, the Methodist Church in 1739 and Episcopal Church in 1789. The list goes on and on, even today, with multiplied hundreds of denominations.

The Reformation Movement, though a step in the right direction, did not go far enough. A far better goal is the *restoration* of the Pure, Simple, Organization, Membership, Worship, Teaching and Work of the first century church of Christ. The scriptural plan is to restore the church to its original state. If we will *believe* what the faithful brethren of the first century church believed, *do* what they did, *live* as they lived, *worship* as they worshipped, *teach* what they taught, and *work* as they worked, we will be what they were, the church established by Jesus the Christ.

If a polluted river is to be restored to its purity, that which contaminated it must be removed. The only way a polluted religion can be restored to its original form is to remove that which causes it to be polluted. The doctrines and commandments of men must be laid aside before there can be a return to pure, simple, New Testament Christianity. In order for there to be unity, true Bible unity, God-approved unity, men must lay aside everything they have added to God's Word and put back everything they have removed from God's Word. This is called *Restoration* — restoring the church to its original condition. This is the way that is right and cannot be wrong.

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CHANGE OF ADDRESS**

Contending For The Faith...

(Continued from page 73)

power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16) for which we are to earnestly contend (Jude 3).

A DELIVERED FAITH

Notice further that the faith is a DELIVERED FAITH. It is not a product of the minds of men, man's genius, invention, or origin. Paul states that his apostleship was of God (Gal. 1:1). In verses 11,12, *"But I certify you brethren, that 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."* What he preached was not a product of his education, former religion, own reasoning, human philosophy, or any such thing. The Gospel is affirmed to be heaven's revelation.

Let us compare two passages, both of which reveal the origin of the Gospel. First Corinthians 2:9-13, *"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit. For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."* The other verses are Ephesians 3:1-5, *"For this cause I Paul the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given unto me to you ward, how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit."*

Both passages tell us of God. What did God do? He made a revelation. What was revealed? All things of God — the mystery of Christ. By whom was this revelation made? By the holy apostles and prophets. By what means is this revelation given? By words, written

and spoken, which the Spirit teacheth, not words originating with men. Here is the source of THE FAITH. We are not dealing with human opinion and experiences. These are not testimonials induced through emotionalism and imagination, but the once-for-all-delivered-faith from God to inspired men through the Holy Spirit. Every word of it is God-breathed. Second Timothy 3:16,17, *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."* The Scriptures teach a verbal, plenary, all-sufficient, infallible, inerrant, authoritative revelation of THE FAITH that is embodied in Scripture as it was given to inspired men.

ONCE FOR ALL

Notice further that the faith was ONCE FOR ALL delivered. The word translated "once" is used of what is of perpetual validity and never in need of repetition. This asserts the timelessness of the Word. This same word "once" is used in Hebrews 9:26,28 regarding the death of Christ. Christ does not have to die a second time. It was all-sufficient the first time. This teaching sinks forever the contention that there is latter-day revelation from God. The Gospel is the same now as it was in the first century, and will remain the same until the Lord returns. It is the same in every generation, in every nation, making no allowance for additions, subtractions, modern-day visions, cultures, dreams, special leadings, etc. THE FAITH is a faith adequate for all time and all people.

A DELIVERED FAITH

THE FAITH was DELIVERED to the saints, God's people. They are the custodians of THE FAITH. First, it was revealed to inspired men, earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7), and now recorded in the inspired book (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Christians are not given the power to make, alter, change, update, or any such thing regarding the Word of God. Christians are the stewards of THE FAITH. As a banker has the responsibility to care for, guard, defend, and properly use that which is placed in his care, so the saints have a similar duty toward the Word. As the Jews were entrusted with

the oracles of God (Rom. 3:2), Christians are entrusted with THE FAITH. Our greatest responsibility and privilege is to love this truth, live it, defend it, preach it, contend for it; and if need be, die for it. If we do not have the strength, concern, courage, will, and conviction to deal with THE FAITH that way, there is none who will.

CONTEND FOR IT

The exhortation in Jude is to CON-TEND earnestly for THE FAITH. This is an obligation and privilege. The word translated “earnestly” comes from a word meaning to agonize, struggle with difficulty against all dangers and antagonists to the Gospel. The word is sometimes translated “strive” (Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 4:10; Luke 13:24), and “fight” in First Timothy 6:12, “*Fight the good fight of faith.*” It is a term of combat and warfare.

Just how does one earnestly contend for the faith? Jude was doing that very thing in this epistle. Recognizing error, false teachers, false doctrines, he was waging war against them. He knew they were not to be ignored and they would not just go away. He had the right, indeed, the duty, to warn brethren about such things until brethren showed an awareness of them. While some ignored the matter, insulted the proclaimers of truth, impugned motives, he still was plain, pointed, powerful, and precise in his presentation on matters regarding sin and religious error. He contended for the faith in the very letter in which he urged others to contend.

PAUL CONTENDED

Paul was contending for the faith when he treated Elymas the way he did. Notice his straightforward and powerful words, “*Then Saul, (who also is called Paul), filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?*” (Acts 13:9,10)? In Galatians two, where Paul recounts his exposure of error in Peter when Peter showed himself inconsistent and compromising; Paul rebuked him to the face, before them all, because Peter was to be blamed. Paul was contending for the faith. When he commanded the withdrawal from those who walked disorderly (Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5:7), he was contending for

the faith. When he specified by name those who needed marking, such as Hymaneus, Alexander, and Philetus” (2 Tim. 4:14), and Demas (2 Tim. 4:10), he was contending for the faith. When John, the apostle of love, named Diotrephes as the disturber that he was (3 John 9), John, like Paul, was contending for the faith. Faithful Gospel preachers who do the same today are lovers of truth, and do not cringe to contend for the faith.

PETER AND OTHERS CONTENDED

When Peter preached the Gospel on Pentecost, when Paul stood before the Jewish councils and Roman courts, when uproars were created in various places, the apostles were contending for the faith. When John warned not to believe every spirit, but try them (1 John 4:1), when Peter warned of false teachers that would bring in damnable heresies and cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of (2 Peter 2:1,2), when Paul urged Timothy that some would depart from the faith, and he was to preach the word in spite of what people said, did, or thought (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:1-4), they were contending for the faith.

May I add a further comment to the words of Paul to Timothy. Second Timothy was the last letter the apostle penned. He realized that apostasy was threatening the church. Still he urged, “*Preach the word.*” When? “*In season; out of season,*” which means, when people like it, and when they do not; when they want it, and when they reject it. By reproof, rebuke, and exhortation, with longsuffering and doctrine, he was to contend for the faith. Why? Because the time was coming when even brethren would not want it; when brethren prefer what they wanted to what God said they needed.

Paul contended for the faith when he warned the Ephesian elders for three years with tears about apostasy coming into the church through them. He taught that elders ought to convict the gainsayers (Titus 1:9), not coddle up to them and run along with them. Stephen was contending for the faith when he fearlessly preached the truth before the very leaders who had caused Christ to be put on the cross. Plainly he told them the truth, even when they hated it. They considered him their enemy because he dared tell them the truth. He gave his life (Acts 7) contending for the faith.

JESUS CONTENDED

Jesus set the example in contending for the faith. Those who perceive Jesus as some kind of effeminate, weak, namby-pamby pacifist, a wishy-washy religionist, just do not know the Lord as Scripture reveals Him. He was no shabby revolutionist either. John called Him the Lamb of God (John 1:29) when speaking of Him as the sacrifice for sins. But John also wrote that He was the Lion of Judah when writing of His character (Rev. 5:5). When He confronted error, His zeal ate Him up. He acted decisively. None could doubt where He stood and none could mistake why He stood as He did. When attacks were made on Him personally, He paid little attention to it. “*When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously*” (1 Peter 2:23). But when the message of truth that He preached was opposed, you find no stronger actions among men than those taken by our Lord. Christlikeness in contending for the faith is sorely needed in the ranks of God’s people in our own day. Too many, who claim to be kind and loving, are just cowards and will not contend for the faith.

In contending for the faith, we must uphold every portion of it. We must oppose anything, everything, anybody, everybody, anywhere, everywhere, any time, every time, that efforts are made to minimize or contradict THE FAITH. Especially is this true when the fiery darts of the evil one come crashing against the church from the outside, and the insidious digression bubbles within the church. We are soldiers of Christ and He is the captain of our faith. We are to go forward in this spiritual warfare to liberate souls from the enslavement of sin, and defend the glorious freedom from sin that is in Christ. Some are spectators and not participators in this fight. Instead of being God’s gladiators, some are Satan’s agitators, undermining like traitors. Faithful men of God must contend earnestly for the once-for-all-delivered-to-the-saints faith.

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THE SIN OF DENOMINATIONALISM

W. Curtis Porter, 1897-1960

The results of denominationalism show it to be displeasing to God. Here are a few reasons:

1) *It Makes Infidels.* What one builds, the other destroys. What one makes, the other unmakes. They lead in different directions. Unity among people who believe the Bible to be the Word of God will do much to lead men to God. Jesus prayed: “*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 17:21). The purpose of unity is here made plain: “that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”

Unity Makes Believers. If it is necessary for believers in Christ to be one that the world may believe on him, then division is certain to have the opposite effect. Denominationalism is a prolific source of infidelity today. When you think of hundreds of conflicting religions being claimed as authorized by the same book, the Bible, what could one expect but infidelity? Men who reason would not be willing to accept a book that is filled with conflicting ideas. But the Bible must be regarded as such a book if denominationalism is to be accepted.

One church teaches that man is saved by faith alone; another teaches that faith alone is not sufficient. One church claims salvation may be had without any conditions; another teaches that salvation is conditional. Some declare that a child of God can never so act as to be lost at last, while others say he may fall away and be lost. By some it is taught that immersion is the only scriptural form of baptism, but others insist that it may be by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. And yet all claim to get their teaching from the Bible. To endorse denominationalism is to say that all these conflicting theories are true and to regard the Bible as a book of inconsistencies and contradictions, and it results in infidels. But the Bible does not teach all these conflicting doctrines; nor does it endorse the existence of denominations. Unity must be based on Bible teaching (1 John 1:7).

2) *It Makes God Contradict Him-*

self. This is closely allied to the point already discussed. Denominational preachers of all types claim a divine call to their ministry. They claim to be preaching because God, in a direct way, has called them to preach. But how inconsistent that would make God! According to the claims of denominationalism, God calls one man to preach **Methodist doctrine** and to build up the Methodist Church. He calls another man to preach **Baptist doctrine** and to build up the Baptist Church. Another is called to advance the cause of **Presbyterianism**. And yet another to preach the **Pentecostal doctrine**. And on and on it goes, with men called to preach the conflicting doctrines of all religious bodies in Christendom. And, the whole thing is charged up to God. He has called one man to deny what he has called another man to preach. Can you believe a thing like that? If you believe that denominationalism is of God, that is what you must believe. I am frank to say that I do not believe it. God does not contradict himself. Anything that makes God contradict himself is sinful.

3) *It Declares God's Way Is Not Sufficient.* Paul said to Timothy: “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This shows the all-sufficiency of God's way. The Word of God is a perfect rule of faith and practice. Nothing in addition to it is needed. It will furnish the man of God to all good works, and what more could we want than that? Yet denominationalism is not satisfied with the way of God. They have formulated their disciplines, manuals, articles of religions, confessions of faith, and creeds to supplement the Word of God. Such action declares God did not give to the world a perfect system, and that man had to come to his rescue and help him out of a difficulty.

Denominationalism turns men away from the unadulterated Word of God to an acceptance of the doctrines

and commandments of men. And that is the very thing that Jesus condemned. He said, “*But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*” (Matt. 15:9). Jesus admonishes men to refrain from following such teachers. “*Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch*” (Matt. 15:13-14). Denominationalism is not a divine planting. God did not plant it. Its leaders are blind guides. Jesus said: “Let them alone.” The statement simply means that we should not follow them, for if we do, we shall fall into the ditch with them. Whenever a man is satisfied with God's revealed way, willing to take just the things found in the Gospel of Christ, he will not build up denominationalism. And, if he labors to build up denominationalism he announces his belief that God's way is not sufficient.

4) *It Demands Acceptance of Other Gospels.* From what has already been said it is evident that denominationalism is not found in the Gospel of Christ. Nothing can be called the Gospel of Christ that is not authorized in the New Testament. But denominationalism is a perverted Gospel. In Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia he said, “*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*” (Gal. 1:6-7). This is the very thing that denominational preachers do. They pervert the Gospel of Christ. They twist it into meaning what it does not mean. But what about men who pervert the Gospel of Christ? Paul answers, “*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*” (Gal. 1:8-9). In the strongest language possible, this shows God's displeasure toward denominationalism.

All the conflicting things proclaimed by denominational preachers cannot belong to the Gospel of Christ. They preach perverted Gospels, other Gospels than that proclaimed by the apostles. Hence, the curse of heaven rests upon them.

5) *It Would Make Christ a Polygamist.* Christ and the church sustain the relationship of husband and wife. We read from the pen of Paul, “*For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body*” (Eph.

5:23). We have many statements showing there is only one body, or church (Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:20). Hence, Christ is the husband of one wife. But if all denominations are bodies of Christ, he is the husband of hundreds of wives. This would make him a polygamist. And that is exactly what the result will be if denominationalism is divinely authorized.

A system that is guilty of sin at so many points should be thrown aside. Let men come back to the Bible, to the Bible alone, and denomination-

alism will disappear from the earth, and the world will profit by the loss.

[EDITOR’S NOTE: This article appeared in *Firm Foundation*, March, 2000. It was also printed in *Old Paths Studies* a few years ago. In this present age when emotions seem to be more important than truth, such great articles are all the more needed. *Old Paths Studies* August 2019, edited by Bob Winton. You can be added to their email list at: bwint38@yahoo.com].

THE NEW CREATURE #1

Bill Boyd

Romans 8:19-23 is a fundamental proof text for a renewed earth theology. It is not an easy text. Romans 8:21 says, “...the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” That is the King James Version. Where the King James Version has the word “creature,” other translations, including the American Standard Version, have the word “creation.” This, itself, is not the problem. For clarity, I prefer the word “creature” in Romans 8:19, 20, and 21, but for the sake of consistency, I will use the word, “creation,” in this article.

Concerning the meaning of the word translated, “creation,” Moses Lard said in his commentary on Romans (pp.265-266), “*On all hands the question is allowed to be difficult. Opinions on the import of the word are about as numerous as the pens used in setting them down; and they clash in hopeless confusion. Hodge enumerates no less than six distinct acceptations in which the word has been taken; while Stuart mentions eleven. The former covers seven pages in discussing it; the latter, five.*” In “*A New Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Saints in Rome*” (1945), Robertson L. Whiteside said (p.181) these verses, “*have given commentators no end of trouble. No one has given an explanation that was satisfactory to all. Where students differ so, it is not well for anyone to be overly dogmatic.*”

My Father, James W. Boyd, wrote a commentary on Romans titled “Sys-

tem of Salvation” (1990). Concerning this passage he said, “*We heartily concur with Peter in Second Peter 3:16 when he said some of the writings of Paul are hard to understand. This passage is one of them.*” In a recent *Truth for Today Commentary on Romans*, published by Resource Publications (2014), David Roper (pp.43-53) takes the view that the “creation” is “*the entire material universe other than the human spirit.*” He said that when Paul, “*tied our hope to the hope of all creation*” that “*he did something unexpected.*” He further said, “*These verses are unlike any other passage in the New Testament.*” As for the meaning of, “creation,” he said, “*There are a variety of viewpoints regarding this question.*” In a separate commentary on Romans by the same publisher (2018), Paul Pollard said, “*The meaning of ktisis (creation) is debated.*” He offers several possibilities, and said, “*Ben Witherington III listed eight possible explanations, and after some discussion, thought that it probably referred to ‘subhuman creatures and nature’*” (p.283). Note the word “probably;” such humility is commended. Pollard agrees with Witherington, but Pollard also says, “*Biblical support for the renovation theory is scanty and not convincing...we should not press the language too far...one must be careful not to be too dogmatic on this subject*” (p.287).

These men have reached different conclusions, but to their credit, they have offered their comments with grace and maturity. The passage is

almost universally considered difficult. When latter day advocates of renewed earth doctrines tell us that this is the easy passage to explain difficult passages, it strains our opinions of their objectivity. As a friend, I caution them about making their renewed earth theories the center of their theologies, or of pushing their theories to the point of contention, or of trying to force passages from other contexts into support of their views. Appealing as their renewed earth ideas may be to them, a “perhaps” is far from a “proof.”

I beg your patience for a word of personal defense. I have been writing about the renewed earth issue in this publication, (*Seek The Old Paths*) since September of 2018. I have been accused of misrepresenting the views of renewed earth advocates, but I have not. I have been challenged to present my sources for the views I have discussed, but I hesitate to do so, especially when it comes to my brethren. I am after the doctrines themselves, and not the persons advocating these doctrines. I have a high regard for some of my brethren with whom I disagree, and I would rather be accused of misrepresentation than to turn this into a discussion of persons. However, in the follow-up to this article I will identify some individuals with their views, and I think after you read how I do so that you will agree that I have done so judiciously and respectfully.

I have been told I need to listen to renewed earth advocates. I have been listening, and I have heard a lot

of things.

1) Some have said the renewed earth will be a restoration of the earth to its condition before man sinned and will be for us a second material Eden, but the text does not say that.

2) Others tell us the renewed earth will be the elements of old earth reconstituted into an improved physical creation better fitted for our resurrected spiritual bodies, but the text does not say that either.

3) Some say that the earth will not actually be destroyed, but only the evil will be removed, along with the sky that separates the earth from heaven, and if we accompany Jesus back to the earth we might get to be part of the clean-up crew.

4) I read from one who said that whatever happens to our home on earth will happen to God's home in heaven, and that therefore God's own heaven will be destroyed by fire along with the earth! Even if it could be shown that the "creation" of Romans 8 is, in whole or in part, the non-rational creation, this itself does not

dash our hope for a heavenly home, or require a renewal of this present material earth.

5) Some suggest that the non-rational creation will be incorporated into the heaven above where Jesus has gone to prepare us a place, but some do not.

6) Some are not sure what to do with hell; they offer various suggestions, including a denial that everlasting punishment will be eternal in duration, but not all of them affirm this. The Jehovah's Witnesses keep heaven and earth separate; they reserve heaven for the hundred and forty-four thousand of Revelation 7:4, and preserve the earth as the eternal home for everyone who is not annihilated.

If we can judge by book sales, **Randy Alcorn** may be the most popular advocate of a renewed earth. His book, "Heaven," has sold over a million copies. He writes of skydiving without a parachute, scuba diving without an air tank, and of how we may get our pets back.

Renewed earth advocates bristle when it is suggested that they are fanaticizing, but imaginative speculations abound. Sometimes it is difficult to tell where their exegesis ends and their speculations begin. In fairness, it is important to note that there is no one renewed earth model, and not all renewed earth advocates are alike. On the down side, these multiple clashing theories tend to discredit their validity.

I have facetiously said to my friends that after my analysis of the passage in Romans 8 is published, all controversies will cease. I hope none of them have taken me seriously. In truth, I think we are going to grapple with this for some time. In this present contentious environment I do not see a ready consensus forming.

In a following article, I will present and critique three basic approaches to Romans 8:19-23. I will tweak one of them as my own, and offer it to my readers for their criticism.

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LISTEN TO LEARN AND LEARN TO LISTEN

As we all know, any healthy relationship is built around good communication. And good communication is the result of our desire to carefully listen to people speaking to us, especially our spouses. The marriage relationship greatly suffers when one or both spouses stop listening. The so-called "generation gap" is the result of poor communication. Both sides may talk a lot about their problems, but if neither side listens, effective communication has not taken place.

What about our relationship to God in all of this? Does it not thrive on healthy communication? Do we not grow spiritually when we speak to our heavenly Father in prayer and carefully listen to His will through the pages of His word (Rev. 2:11)?

Regarding our listening capability, one preacher was heard to say, "It's so hard for us to listen to learn, if we haven't learned to listen."

God recognizes our difficulty in listening when He encourages us to "be swift to hear" (James 1:19); to "take heed how you hear" (Luke 8:18); and instructs, "He that hath an ear, let him hear" (Rev. 2:7).

After our Lord reminded His disciples of certain men whose "ears are dull (hard) of hearing" (Matt. 13:15), He commended his disciples by saying: "But blessed are...your ears, for they hear" (Matt. 13:16).

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Cain and Abel were the sons of Adam and Eve (Gen. 4:1-2). Abel was a keeper of the sheep while Cain was a tiller of the ground (Gen. 4:2). As time passed, these brothers brought sacrifices to God. God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's offering (Gen. 4:4-5). This rejection caused Cain to become angry and he vented his anger by killing his brother (Gen. 4:5-6).

In studying the whole Bible, we learn Cain disobeyed God in the sacrifice he made. Abel offered his sacrifice "by

faith" (Heb. 11:4). Paul says, "so then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). These two verses prove that Cain and Abel were told how and what to sacrifice. Cain chose to sacrifice as he willed and to disobey God's word. God would have accepted his sacrifice if he had obeyed (Gen. 4:7). Instead of repenting and obeying God, he killed his brother (Gen. 4:8). Abel was the only one who did right in his offering (Heb. 11:4). Cain was in sin (1 John 3:12). It is sad to see Cain turn from God — just to have his own way (Jude 11).

Cain should be a great lesson for us today (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). We have people today that are members of churches that men established. Instead of obeying God, they began their own church (Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:7-9). Instead of wearing the name of Christ, they wear the names of men (1 Cor. 1:10-13). Men replace the plan God gave for man's salvation with their own plan (Matt. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16). Some churches accept fornicators into their worship but God says it is a sin to do so (Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). God gave the command to sing in worship but man changed this worship by adding instrumental music. Where is their authority for that (Col. 3:17)?

Many more things could be added to this list of changes but these are enough to show that the spirit of Cain is alive and well in the world today (Jude 11).

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