



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

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CAN A GOD OF LOVE BE A GOD OF WRATH?

A. L. Parr

Rules are made to establish order and provide for the welfare of all who are subject to them. God has established rules by which all men must live if they expect to receive the benefits of citizenship in God's kingdom.

"Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men" (Exodus 32:26-28).

Such passages of Scripture as this are offensive to some people. A man told me, "I just can't believe in a God who goes around killing people." Moses had the same idea (Exodus 32:32).

At first thought my correspondent may seem to have a good point. Here is God leading His "chosen people" out of slavery into a "promised land," and at a stop along the way He orders one tribe of them to "go in and out from gate to gate" killing their brothers, companions and neighbors! To the civilized man of the 21st century it does sound rather barbaric, doesn't it? Rather beneath us than above us.

Then, too, what about those passages in the Bible that describe God as the epitome of love (i.e. 1 John 4:8)? Aren't the two images of God

contradictory? Don't these contradictions render the whole book unbelievable? Doesn't someone worshipping a God of love have a right to reject a God of killing and destruction? Isn't the person right who says, "But my God is a loving God; He wouldn't do such things as that?"

IT'S NO LIE

Those who reason that way may be overlooking very important facts. Certainly it is not a lie that the God of the Bible is a God of love — it is Scripture! But so is the passage we quoted in the beginning (Exodus 32:26-28). So what can we do? We can believe that both passages describe the nature of God, and not inconsistently (1 Cor. 14:33)!

The *wrath of God* (Eph. 5:6), His requirement that men obey Him in order to receive His blessings (Eph. 5:1-3); and, His punishment of the disobedient (Eph. 5:4-5), are necessary elements of His love and justice (Heb. 12:5-11).

Think for a moment. Is it love that makes no rules governing a standard of behavior? Do parents permit their children and do societies permit their citizens to act in whatever way that appeals to them at any given moment? Such a condition would amount to anarchy. Rules are made to establish order and provide for the

welfare of all who are subject to them.

The family or kingdom of God is no different. It is not reasonable to think God would grant His blessings of eternal security to all people, regardless of their behavior or spiritual condition. God has established rules by which all people must live if they expect to receive the benefits of citizenship in His kingdom or membership in His family (Eph. 1:3). Since rules are made, are they not to be enforced? Must not the rule (law) breakers within any civilized society be punished? Would we permit those who threaten our lives or security in our homes be left alone to work their evil deeds? Surely not! Would we, then, require God to leave unpunished those in His kingdom who would mock authority and tear down the rules by which that spiritual society is organized? Not if we are consistent!

Punishment of law breakers does not imply lack of love. A parent can love a child, yet still punish the child when needed. So, too, God can love his children and still punish them when they do wrong (Heb. 12:5-7).

TAUGHT AT THE SAME TIME

Love and punishment are so connected that they are taught, not only

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God Of Love/Wrath...



Editorial...

ELDERS ARE TO STOP THE MOUTHS OF GAINSAYERS

Garland M. Robinson

One who is an elder (and collectively as an eldership) has been given the task to hold *“fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince (convict, in view of putting to shame) the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers... Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s (gain, reward) sake”* (Titus 1:9-11).

In far too many places it’s rare to find congregations that desire, yea demand, that the elders fulfill their work and responsibility in regards to convicting the gainsayers. It is apparent from common observation of the complete absence in most places of men who are willing to battle and contend with error as Titus 1:9 and Jude 3 demands! Such men are not qualified to be shepherds over God’s heritage! Too many cry *“peace, peace, when there is no peace”* (Jer. 8:11). Inspiration speaks of such men in Isaiah 56:10-11, *“His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.”*

In many places elders keep the money, write checks, maintain the building and whatever other chores, some of which, can be done by deacons. The work of elders has more to do with spiritual things than things of the world. In Acts 6:2 we read of the apostles giving themselves to the spiritual work of the Lord’s kingdom. It was not good that they *“leave the word of God, and serve tables”* (Acts 6:1-2). Elders are not apostles, but none-the-less, they are tasked with the work of

making sure the word of the inspired apostles and prophets is honored and observed.

Each member of a local congregation is to work in the vineyard of God’s kingdom. It’s not that the elders are above doing any menial task, but that each one should primarily work in those areas for which they are best suited — that’s their job. It takes the entire membership to carry on all the works of the Lord’s kingdom (1 Cor. 12:14-29).

One of the major functions of elders is to watch out for the souls of the members over which they have oversight. On judgment day they will give an account in regards to that role (Heb. 13:17). An important part of their “watching” is concerning the potential harm and destruction that can be brought upon the “flock of God” by whatever means, especially doctrinal error. Not only must they watch out for error, but watch out for those who promote it as well. Their job is to keep abreast of the many errors that can harm God’s people and inform those who may be taken in by it. They are to go beyond simply informing the membership of the danger; they are to **“stop the mouths”** of those promoting it in their midst (Titus 1:9). They have the means, ability, and authority to do so! Elders who either “can not” or “will not” exercise their obligation to stop the mouths of false teachers are not qualified to be elders/shepherds! The means by which they exercise their authority is the *“sword of the spirit”* — the Bible, the holy word of God (Eph. 6:17).

An elder(s) must hold *“fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”* False teachers’ *“mouths must be stopped”* because they *“subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not.”*

How may elders carry out this task? Do the elders where you attend do so?

First, elders must recognize false doctrine/teaching. If a teaching is not Truth, it is Error. Truth is strait and narrow. Error is broad and wide (Matt. 7:13-14). There are many errors regarding: 1) Becoming a Christian — such as “faith only,” etc. 2) Living godly lives (Titus 2:11-12), 3) Worship, 4) Work of the church.

Worship is plain, simple and from the heart, not emotional outbursts that detract from reverent worship. Everything is to be done *“decently and in order”* (1 Cor. 14:40). Worship is not a bonanza — “a situation or event that creates a sudden increase in wealth, good fortune, or profits.” **The Lord’s church is not a place to make a name for yourself, climb the ladder to success, or otherwise making merchandise of it by charging admission or a participation fee.** In regards to Bible authority, there is no commandment, no example, or no inference (implication) to use the church in such a fashion.

Worship includes *SINGING and making melody in our heart* (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Singing involves teaching. Mechanical instruments of music cannot teach and are forbidden (cf. Col. 3:17). Worship involves observing *the LORD’S SUPPER* and is observed every first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Partaking of it any other day of the week, or as often or as seldom as we like is not according to the New Testament pattern (Acts 20:7). What was taught and observed in one congregation was taught and observed in every congregation. As the apostles and other inspired brethren traveled from place to place *“they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem”* (Acts 16:4). **PREACHING** is a vital part of every Sunday worship (Acts 20:7). It involves reproving, rebuking, and exhorting (2 Tim. 4:2). **GIVING** a contribution is observed every first day of the week by every member (1 Cor. 16:1-2). **PRAYER** is certainly an act of worship and indispensable as worshippers of God. Jesus taught that *“men ought always to pray, and not to faint”* (Luke 18:1). The church in Jerusalem was not forgetful to do so (Acts 12:4).

There are often things done “by

the church” that are not the “work of the church.” There’s a difference between the work of the *home* (individuals), *businesses* (schools, etc.) and the *work of the church*. The work of the church is limited to: 1) Teaching the lost (evangelism), 2) Edifying the saints (enabling the members to grow spiritually), 3) Helping the needy (benevolence). More and more churches are leaving these three simple acts and including things for which they cannot give a “book, chapter, and verse.”

Second, elders must identify the teacher(s) teaching/spreading error. No better way can this be done than to see, hear, and read concerning his/her teaching and practice. It certainly would prove helpful to actually talk with him. Ask specific questions — pointed questions. For the one questioned to “hem-haw” and “beat around the bush” is a first alert to any wise observing eldership. They must also consider his overall practice and teaching regarding a thing for such men “*serve their own bellies*” (Rom. 16:18). However, they will not always be completely honest and reveal all they believe and/or practice when you speak with them. Such a person that has a track record of not practicing the truth will many times tell you what you want to hear or will only tell you “part” of their belief. To avoid being taken in by such evasive tactics, a wise eldership must not be immediately satisfied, even if they receive a “correct answer” to a question. They would do well to have a list of pertinent questions to ask and then require a full explanation of each one.

It may be prudent to ask the same question a second time but worded differently. I knew a preacher that was asked a question regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. He gave the correct answer according to Matthew 19:9 — “*Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*” But when asked if one who had not put away their spouse because of fornication and had married again could remain in that marriage, he replied YES, he/she could remain in his/her marriage. Same question, but gave a different answer! I have seen gross inconsistencies discovered this way. Require that the question be an-

swered specifically, such as: is this a sin, or is it not? Surely, no “preacher of the gospel” would fear being asked of the “*hope that is within him*” (1 Peter 3:15). All Christians are under obligation to give such an answer.

Third, after identifying the error and the one spreading it, elders must expose him for what he is so that others may see and know. The scriptures demand that sin be exposed (laid bare) so that it may be seen for what it really is. This is exactly the meaning of the word “reprove” in 2 Timothy 4:2 — “*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*” Elders who love the truth cannot let men ravish and plunder the church with their false doctrine while they sit idly by and fail and/or refuse to expose such a person. There is NO LOVE for the truth in those who allow error to be preached and taught, whether in the pulpit or classroom. The Lord’s business is serious business. It’s not a game or popularity contest. Our message is not how to win friends and influence people. Our message is Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). Paul did not shun to declare ALL the counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

The Lord exposed the hypocrisy and false teaching of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23). He exhorts us to do likewise. “***Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits***” (Matt. 7:15-16). The church at Rome was told to “***mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye 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***” (Rom. 16:17-18). We are to “***have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them***” (Eph. 5:11). We are to abide in the doctrine of Christ and “***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).

God saw fit to place shepherds over each local congregation. Their function is to feed (tend) the church of

God (1 Peter 5:2) and keep it pure from all error, whether it be moral or otherwise. Why can’t they do their job as the scriptures demand? They will if they are qualified! **If they are not opposing, exposing and stopping the mouths of those who promote error, THEY ARE NOT QUALIFIED FOR THE WORK!** Such men must repent or else!

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

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LEADERS MUST LEAD

Jason Patrick Hilburn

Throughout history, God has revealed that in any group of people there is a great need for leadership. A system of authority can bring order out of chaos and peace out of strife. Even in a group of only two people, such as the husband and wife, God has placed one in authority over the other, giving the husband the leadership role of the household (Eph. 5:22-24). There is also a type of leadership in the Godhead Itself, in that God the Father is Head (Psa. 104:30; 1 Cor. 11:3; 15:27-28). It is therefore no surprise that God would establish a system of leadership in the precious Body purchased by the blood of His Son (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 1:18-19). God has revealed that He desires every congregation of the Lord's church to be led by Scripturally qualified elders: *"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed"* (Acts 14:23; cf. Titus 1:5-9; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-3). Because of their God-given authority and duty, elders can rightfully be called the "leaders" of the congregation.

The very word "leaders" implies that they are not merely passively observing, but rather actively leading the way as shepherds guiding a flock of sheep. The illustration of elders as shepherds is used several times in the Scriptures. Paul admonished the elders at Ephesus, *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock"* (Acts 20:28-29; cf. 1 Peter 5:1-3). The word translated as "feed" can actually mean "to tend as a shepherd" (Strong's). The use of such words as "flock" and "wolves" gives the reader a picture of shepherds overseeing sheep. Paul also called elders "pastors" (Eph. 4:11), which means "shepherds" (compare pastor with pasture). When the Holy Spirit inspired David the shepherd to write "The Shepherd Psalm," He made it clear that a good shepherd leads his sheep to safety:

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Psa. 23:1-3). Christ, the "Shepherd and Bishop of our souls" has led the way for His sheep, leaving an example that men should follow to get to Heaven (1 Peter 2:21-25; John 10:27). With all of this in mind, godly leaders will be living holy lives and taking an active lead in the work of the church, setting an example the flock can follow to get to the safety of Heaven.

ELDERS SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD IN BENEVOLENCE

If it is the duty of every Christian to "do good unto all men" (Gal. 6:10; cf. Acts 4:32-35; 11:27-30), then certainly the leaders of the congregation should lead the way in such efforts! While having a proper understanding of their God-given authority, godly elders will also have an attitude of servitude. It is understood that others may need to be appointed to "serve tables" (Acts 6:2), but even our Lord, the Great Second Person of the Godhead, possessed the heart of a servant who was kind and helpful to others. He left that humble example for all of His sheep to follow — even elders (John 13:3-17; Matt. 23:11-12; 25:34-46; Phil. 2:5-9). If shepherds are following the Great Shepherd, they will be seeking ways to help and serve others. Members of the local congregation should see a pattern of benevolence in the elders that they can follow. If elders are not benevolent, are they leading the flock in the right direction by their example?

ELDERS SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD IN EDIFICATION

If it is the duty of every Christian to edify their brethren (Eph. 4:11-12, 16, 29; Rom. 14:19; 1 Thess. 5:11), then certainly the leaders of the congregation should be great examples of those who edify! If anyone in the congregation should seek to "build up" the members, surely it should be the

elders — the ones watching for the souls of the flock (Heb. 13:17). Members of the local congregation should see a pattern of edification in their leaders that they can follow. If elders are not those who build up their brethren, provoking them *"unto love and to good works"* (Heb. 10:24), are they leading the flock in the right direction by their example?

ELDERS SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD IN EVANGELISM

If it is the duty of every Christian to be evangelistic (Mark 16:15-16; Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:2), then certainly the leaders of the congregation should lead the way in evangelistic efforts! The Chief Shepherd came *"to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10; Matt. 18:11-17). If shepherds are following the Chief Shepherd, they will always be looking for opportunities to teach people the Truth of the Gospel, knowing that their mission is the same as the Lord's. Members of the local congregation should see a pattern of evangelism in the elders that they can follow. If elders are not evangelistic, are they leading the flock in the right direction by their example?

ELDERS SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD IN PROTECTING THE FLOCK

An essential part of shepherding is guarding the flock from danger. The Good Shepherd withstood the wolves of His day (Matt. 23; John 9-10). God has made it clear that today's shepherds must recognize, confront, and silence false teachers who threaten the spiritual well-being of the flock. Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders because there were *"many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers,"* and he said that an elder must *"hold fast the faithful word"* to exhort and convict the gainsayers (Titus 1:9-11). For three years, Paul warned the Ephesian elders that some would work secretly to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30). Could the rebuke of the Ephesian church in Revelation chapter two have been avoided if the elders had fulfilled that charge? Shepherds cannot ignore

such dangers.

Elders must be strong enough and loving enough to remove the leaven of sin, whether it is immorality, divisiveness, or doctrinal impurity (1 Cor. 5; Rom. 16:17; Titus 1:5-11). Protecting the flock requires conviction, courage, and vigilance. Members of the congregation should see in their elders a pattern of doctrinal soundness and spiritual readiness (Phil. 1:17; 1 Peter 3:15). If elders do not protect the flock,

the flock can easily be scattered or destroyed.

CONCLUSION

In every aspect of their lives, elders should be actively setting examples which the flock can safely follow. The writer of Hebrews wrote, *“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering*

the end of their conversation” (Heb. 13:7). If today’s members of the Lord’s church follow the pattern of the elders who are leading them, will those members go to Heaven? If not, then those elders will not be in Heaven either!

May the shepherds of the Lord’s church actively lead the sheep by their godly examples to the safety of Heaven, where the Chief Shepherd awaits.

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God Of Love/Wrath...

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in the same book, but in the same chapter. That chapter is not some obscure, out of the way chapter, either. It is the chapter perhaps most often quoted, even by unbelievers, concerning the love of God.

Millions of people who know almost nothing else about the Bible, know that John 3:16 says, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* How many are aware that John 3:36 says, *“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”*

One might say, “I accept the principle of punishment, but why death? Couldn’t God just slap them on the wrist and tell them how wrong their behavior was?” Actually, some think this is all that is included in God’s words to the Hebrews: *“Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth”* (Heb. 12:5-6).

Though such people have not fully read the Bible, it is evident that the passage in Hebrews must be understood in the light of all that God has revealed about himself. The Scriptures clearly show that God sanctioned the death of many of the disobedient during Old and New Testament times (Acts 5:1-11). Why?

THE EASY ANSWER: GOD SAID IT

The first and easiest answer is that such a punishment was consistent

with the law and warnings of God. In the Garden of Eden, God had told Adam that he was not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God said, *“For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”* (Gen. 2:16-17). The word God used for “die” means to “be separated.” God’s warning was that in the event of his disobedience, Adam would be separated from the garden and its benefits.

One of those benefits was close fellowship with God. In his sinless state Adam walked with God, but having disobeyed, he was no longer accorded that privilege.

Another benefit of the garden was the tree of life. As long as Adam ate of that tree he would not “die” (be separated from the flesh). Upon Adam’s sin God banished Adam from the garden (hence the tree) and put an angel-guard in the way of the tree to prevent its access (Gen. 3:24). No longer were Adam and his descendants blessed with uninterrupted — untroubled life (Gen. 3:17-19).

All those who died under the authority of God throughout Bible history, died because of sin — not the sin of Adam, but their own sin (Heb. 3:7-11). In the New Testament we read that *“all have sinned”* (Rom. 3:23) and that *“the wages of sin is death”* (Rom. 6:23). Each person pays the price for his own disobedience, not for that of Adam (Ezek. 18:20).

The question still might be asked, “Why death? If it is because God said so, why did God say so? Could He not have determined a lesser punishment for disobedience if He wanted to? If He wanted to, why didn’t He, and if He didn’t want to, why not? Doesn’t all this show God to be immoral and vindictive, and doesn’t that make him something less than the good, loving, and benevolent God his followers claim

him to be? How can you say that God is loving and kind and gracious, and still acknowledge such severe wrath?”

These are good questions. They deserve answers. They deserve answers from the Bible. The Bible answers these questions, and does so in a way designed to lead man into a greater love of and devotion to God.

WHY DEATH?

If God punished the disobedient with death in order to keep His own promise, why did He promise death in the first place? Wouldn’t a loving God have dealt with disobedience in another way? The answer, no he would not!

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). He created the stars of space, the atmosphere enveloping earth, all plant and animal life on earth. Then, having created a place for him, He created man. No other being ever had the power to create. God is omnipotent (all powerful).

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it” (Gen. 2:16-17). God set certain limits for man’s behavior and then gave him the option of remaining within those limits or violating them. He gave man “freedom of choice.” God is omni-benevolent (all-loving).

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her; and he did eat” (Gen. 3:6). Knowing the limits which God had set for him, Adam (of his own free choice) violated those limits. Man chose for himself opposite to what God had chosen for

him.

God did not force man to obey, and for that reason God's will is sometimes seen as merely a request or suggestion offered to man. But behavior out of harmony with God's will separates man from fellowship with God. Thus, the will of God is a command to man, the disobedience of which results in man's separation from God.

When man elected to do what God did not want him to do, he separated himself from God. *"Can two walk together, except they be agreed"* (Amos 3:3)?

SIN, SEPARATION, DEATH

Life is in God (John 1:4), and *"he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things"* (Acts 17:25). Since life is in God, then outside of God there is no life — but death (1 John 5:12). Since God gives life to all, no other being or power can give life to anyone. Thus, to be separated from God is to have, not life, but death.

"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). God is omniscient (all-knowing). He knows the hearts of men. He knows whether a sinner will repent. In earlier times, when God was showing Himself to

man by example (1 Cor. 10:11), those who were completely lost in sin, He destroyed in the flesh as an example of what sin will do in the spirit. They were not going to turn. God used them as examples so others might learn and avoid the same fate (Rom. 15:4).

When God promised death for disobedience, He was not designing a punishment. He was merely stating the logical "cause-and-effect facts" that already existed by nature of the fact that He is the perfect creator. If He had never made the promise, it would still be a fact. From the fact that He promised it, we learn that He is trustworthy, powerful and to be obeyed.

WHY SO SEVERE?

Could a loving God have provided a lesser punishment for disobedience if He had wanted to? No, He could not! Since God is the perfect being that He is, everyone that is not God is imperfect. That is, not invariably choosing and doing right, not measuring up to the glory of God. In short, all have sinned (Rom. 3:23). Sin is transgression of (going beyond, or doing other than) God's law or will (1 John 3:4). To do other than God's will is to separate oneself from God. To separate oneself from God is to separate oneself

from life (John 1:4). Spiritual death is a simple, logical fact for all who sin (and all *do* sin). God has simply stated the logical truth, not made up a rule designed to be cruel to man. If a man does not love God sincerely and obey Him wilfully, that man will most assuredly perish absolutely.

God is not "immoral and vindictive." He is not "something less than the good, loving, and benevolent God His followers claim him to be." For Him to have followed any other course of action than that He has followed in dealing with the sin of man would have shown Him to be less than perfect, hence, not God, no better than the equal of man.

We can "say that God is loving and kind and gracious, and still acknowledge such severe wrath" because God is not the author of sin in the world. He did not bring it in, and He does not perpetuate it here. He recognizes its existence, legislates against participation in it, provides a way of escape from its power, and encourages all mankind to avoid it. He is our God.

Don't let a wrong idea of the nature of God prevent you from knowing the blessings of the true, loving, and merciful God of Heaven.

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LET LOVE BE WITHOUT DISSIMULATION

Foy Forehand

In Romans 12:9-10 we read, *"Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another; in honor preferring one another..."*

These two verses set forth essential concepts of **the life** authorized by, and acceptable to, Jesus the Christ. Colossians 3:17 shows, *"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."* We find three essential principles in Romans 12:9-10!

After commanding correct thinking in verse three, and setting forth important precepts regarding the unity of the body of Christ (vs. 4-8), the Holy Spirit turns His attention to these three principles controlling the life of a Christian.

While we must learn from the

Old Testament (Rom. 15:4), God makes it pointedly evident that the New Testament ALONE is our authority for the age of Christ's authority. In Matthew 28:18-20 this is emphasized, concluding in verse 20, *"...Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."* This always needs repeating — *"teaching them to observe."* We constantly need to be reminded, *"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth"* (2 Peter 1:12). While the truth is present, not absent, we need reminders.

Consider Exodus 34:27-28, Deut. 5:1-3, Eph. 2:11-16, Col. 2:14-17, Rom. 15:4, and Gal. 3:24-25. After carefully reading these passages, consider Romans 7:12-13: *"So that the law is holy,*

and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good. Did then that which is good become death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might be shown to be sin, by working death to me through that which is good; — that through the commandment sin might become exceeding sinful."

Consider this essential principle: **LOVE MUST BE GENUINE.** *"Let love be without dissimulation."* What is dissimulation? For what it is worth, three Greek words are translated by the phrase, *"Let love be without dissimulation."* Or as we find in the American Standard Translation, *"Let love be without hypocrisy."* That original Greek phrase may have sounded like, *"He agape anupocritos."*

What is the significance of the word "let"? What the koine Greek language experts call "the hortatory subjunctive" carries the force of a com-

mand. In this instance, by using the word “let,” God is giving mankind a command. The Holy Spirit **commands** every Christian to love without hypocrisy.

Jesus commanded love. In John 13:34 we read, “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” In John 15:9 Jesus commands, “Even as the Father hath loved me, I also have loved you: abide ye in my love.” Consider the eternal significance of Jude 20-21. Addressing the false doctrine of “once saved always saved” as forced into Romans 8:38-39, Jude is inspired to pen, “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

What think ye? Notice the personal responsibility laid on every saved person by the words of this inspired man, probably a half-brother of Jesus: “...keep yourselves in the love.” Again, in John 15:12 Jesus says, “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you.”

The Holy Spirit revealed and inspired the writings of the New Testament apostles and prophets, John 16:12-14, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you.” Many passages prove this truth. John 12:48-50, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.” In Ephesians 3:3-5 we read, “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...” Yet, perhaps the single most pertinent verse on this point is 1 Corinthians 14:37 which clarifies, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.”

The Holy Spirit continues to emphasize the necessity for love as recorded in 1 John 4:7-11, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” This love must be “unfeigned” — “without hypocrisy.” 2 Corinthians 6:6, commands “in pureness, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in love unfeigned.” The Holy Spirit reinforces this in 1 Peter 1:22, “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,”

Consider this essential principle: **ABHOR EVIL.** 1 Thess. 5:21-22, “prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.” Proverbs 6:16-19, These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”

The word hate is found in 85 verses in the ASV and primarily is describing humanity’s attitude toward God and therefore what God will do to them. Sometimes it references hate between individuals as in Genesis 26:26-27, “Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath his friend, and Phicol the captain of his host. And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore are ye come unto me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you?” Deuteronomy 5:9b, “...for I, Jehovah, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon

the children, and upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate me...”

There is perfect hatred which every Christian should practice, Psalm 139:19-22, “Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: Depart from me therefore, ye bloodthirsty men. For they speak against thee wickedly, And thine enemies take thy name in vain. Do not I hate them, O Jehovah, that hate thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: They are become mine enemies.” Romans 12:9b, “Abhor that which is evil...”

Consider this essential principle: **KNOW AND DO WHAT IS GOOD.** Who decides what is good? Who defines “good? The eternal nature of the unchanging eternal God is the exact essence of the very definition of good! Second Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” With this passage, compare 2 John 9-11, “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. 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.” Luke 6:27, “But I say unto you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you...” Luke 8:15, “In an honest and good heart...” Romans 12:2, “And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Romans 12:21, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Folks, young, old, or anywhere in between, 1 Corinthians 15:33 still states, “Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals” (ASV).

These three principles: **LOVE MUST BE GENUINE; WE MUST HATE EVIL; and KNOW AND DO WHAT IS GOOD**, must be **our** most significant motive as Christians! For any individual’s life to be acceptable to God, it is essential that these three principles be known and observed! Matt. 28:20.

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A STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF GRACE

John Chowning

Change is difficult. Bad habits are far easier to make than break. The roots of a besetting sin reach deeper and are tougher to eliminate than imagined.

Earlier this year, I participated in an eight-week seminar on healthier living. The leader of the seminar had worked closely for several years with alcohol and other drug addicts. He stated that the most significant piece of wisdom he gleaned from this experience was that to change destructive behavior in humans, a person needs to be held to a standard of excellence in an atmosphere of grace.

The most effective teachers are ones who expect every student to do well. They set the standard for student achievement high. They are demanding but also gracious when mistakes are made or ignorance comes to light. A student is not embarrassed or ridiculed for making a mistake. Rather, they are encouraged to learn from their error(s) and not repeat the same mistake twice. I have had some students in elementary school who were so afraid of being wrong and then embarrassed for it, they refused to try. It was safer that way.

While remembering our Lord's death with my beloved brethren recently, I was reminded of this insightful observation. As you and I discern the Lord's body, we recognize that a significant reason for the bread's unleavened nature is to bring to our remembrance Jesus' sinlessness. He did no sin (1 Peter 2:22). God's lamb for my sin was perfect, without blemish or spot (1 Peter 1:19). The excellence of His sinless life is the standard by which I am to examine myself and my life (1 Cor. 11:28). God's standard for my life as a Christian is inflexible, unchanging, and perfect. Clearly, God has the highest standard of excellence for every one of His children.

The cup reminds me that God's standard of excellence is bathed in an atmosphere of grace. For every one of my blemishes and insufficiencies made evident by Christ's sinless example and standard, Christ's blood is sufficient. If I walk in the light, even though I do so imperfectly, I will have fellowship with God and the blood of Christ will cleanse me from all sins (1 John 1:7).

My shortcomings and sinful imperfections are not ignored or excused in any way, nor am I embarrassed or ridiculed for them. The blood of Christ is God's gracious provision. There is no reason for me to quit trying. I need ever to strive for greater holiness and spiritual excellence in my life.

In addition, there is no reason to compromise God's perfect standard of spiritual excellence for me as it is exemplified in Immanuel's life. God's atmosphere of grace, memorialized in the Lord's Supper by Christ's blood, is not and never will be an excuse for sin in my life (Rom. 6:1-2). Rather, this weekly memorial of God's standard of excellence in an atmosphere of grace, when properly remembered, will rightfully provoke me to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world — *"looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing*

of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:12-14).

Long before we humans figured out that the best way to make real and lasting changes in our lives was to hold ourselves accountable to a standard of excellence in an atmosphere of grace. Jesus took unleavened (i.e. Passover) bread, gave thanks to God, and said to His disciples, *"Take; eat; this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me"* (1 Cor. 11:23-24). Then, *"also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink [it], in remembrance of me"* (1 Cor. 11:25). This is why we ought to leave every Lord's Day assembly as better people than we came (1 Cor. 11:17). This is why we need to fight the good fight, finish the course, and keep the faith (cf. 2 Tim. 2:7).

God wants each of us to be spiritually successful (Rom. 8:37), and He has provided us the perfect conditions to do so. He has given us a standard of excellence in an atmosphere of grace.

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