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Co-Editor's Column IS THERE NOT A CAUSE? (II) Garland Elkins



THERE IS A CAUSE WHEN WE CONTEND FOR THE PLAN OF SALVATION

None who believes the New Testament doubts Christ's right to make the terms of admission into the church, since the church belongs to Him and all authority is given to Him. Our interest should be "What does He require?" He is the door, and we must enter in harmony with His will.

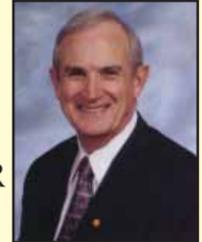
1. Faith is required (John 6:24; Mark 16:16; Heb. 11:6). Faith is the first step toward righteousness (Rom. 10:10), and toward the church.
2. Repentance is required (Luke 13:3; Mat. 21:28-31). Repentance leads to life (Acts 11:18). God "now commandeth all men to repent" (Acts 17:30).
3. The confession is necessary. Christ made the good confession before Pilate (1 Tim. 6:13). Peter made the good confession, which is: "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God" (Mat. 16:16). This caused Christ to pronounce a blessing upon him. Christ has promised that "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Mat. 10:32). Confession with the mouth leads to salvation (Rom. 10:10), and must, therefore, precede the saved state.
4. Baptism is necessary in order to be saved. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). No one can be saved from his past sins until he has been baptized according to our Lord.

WHEN WE PLEAD FOR NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP, WE HAVE A CAUSE

We cannot have just anything in our worship and please God. The component parts of true worship are stated by Christ in John 4:24.

1. The early church taught in worship (Acts 2:42; 20:7).
2. Prayer is another item of worship in the Lord's church (Acts 2:42). Prayer is to be addressed to God, not to Mary, or some other "saint." Prayers are to be prayed to God, and in the name of Christ (Eph. 5:20).
3. The congregations in the days of the apostles gave their contributions, as the Lord prospered them, on the first day of every week (1 Cor. 16:1-2).
4. The church of the first century sang as an act of worship (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). The early Christians were limited in their making of music to vocal music; that is, singing. They did not use organs, pianos, banjos, guitars, nor other mechanical instruments in their praise to God. They sang--they did not play! Any church of our day that employs such mechanical instruments in its worship is not identical to the New Testament church. The true church of Christ now (as always) limits its music to singing, just as did the church of the first century.
5. The New Testament church, in addition to teaching, prayer, giving, and singing, also partook of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). The Bible teaches that it must be done on the first day of the week. The church of the first century, as do all faithful churches today, partook of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week.

(CONTINUED NEXT MONTH)



From The Director W. DOUGLASS HARRIS, SPLENDID GOSPEL PREACHER AND DEAR FRIEND, PASSES

On Monday, September 27, 2004, at age eighty-six, brother "Doug" Harris went to his reward. He had been a faithful proclaimer of the unadulterated Word, which he dearly loved, for sixty-seven years, most of which time was spent in located work with congregations in Texas, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. He was also instrumental in starting congregations in numerous places; he was a builder and a peace-maker among brethren.

Brother Harris was well educated, having been graduated from David Lipscomb College in 1936, from Harding College (B.A.) in 1940, and from the University of Georgia (M.A.) in 1945. He taught Bible at Dasher Bible School (now Georgia Christian School) for a time in early years and in later years taught New Testament Greek in the Alabama Christian School of Religion (now Southern Christian University). For ten years, he served additionally as an elder at Beech Street (now Point Mallard Parkway).

This outstanding Christian gentleman also took a very active part in the evangelistic work in the Caribbean Islands. For nearly ten years, he was Associate Editor of the *Caribbean Messenger*, mainly circulated in the Caribbean. Beginning in 1988, he would serve as its Editor. Brother Harris' influence was widespread in taking the Truth to the world, especially across the United States and the Caribbean.

My earliest recollections of brother Doug were when he would come for meetings where Dad was preaching. He would take me (at that time I was a teenager in Montgomery and beginning to preach) "under his wing" and lend great encouragement. My father loved brother Doug, as do I. All through the years, he would boost the work of preaching and training preachers in which I have been involved. He would do this to everyone who loved the Old Paths and walked in them.

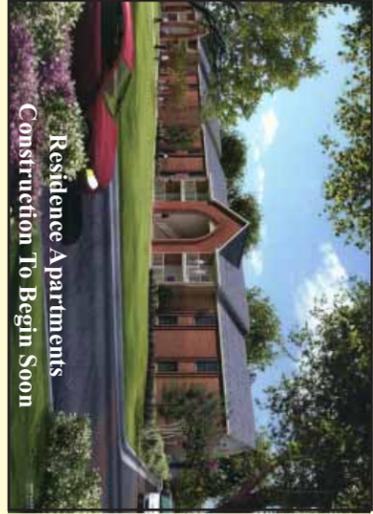
I got the impression also that brother Harris loved located work. His labors were not always easy; in fact, on occasions he was invited to work where problems, even

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

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(CATES: Continued from Page 1)

divisions, existed. He did his best to strengthen the brethren and bring about reconciliation. And, he used his significant influence to keep brethren from moving into extremism, either to the right or to the left. He stated that he had been privileged to hear such greats as G. C. Brewer, Hall L. Calhoun, Horace Busby, H. Leo Boles, and N. B. Hardeman; those who “had the most influence and provided the most personal help were Gus Nichols and Franklin Camp.” As brother Harris himself was helped, so did he help and strengthen other gospel preachers.

His devoted wife of sixty-two years, sister Margaret Copeland Harris, outstanding Christian, was an integral, vital part of brother Harris’ work. Our sincere sympathy and prayers are with sister Harris, their three children, two grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. Memorial services took place September 30th at the Austinville Church of Christ, Decatur, Alabama, and grave side services were in Dasher, Georgia, October 2nd.

Curtis A. Cates

STRIFE

(Continued from September issue)

Bobby Liddell

WHERE WILL STRIFE END?

Strife is not harmless, innocuous, and undeserving of attention and correction. It causes discord (cf. Prov. 6:16-19). Such discord is detrimental, even deadly if unchecked, to the local church. McClintock and Strong report the view the early church had toward strife.

In the early Church it was considered a privilege to make oblations to the Church, and a sort of lesser excommunication to be debarred from doing so. The officers would not receive the offerings of persons that were at enmity or variance with their brethren, neither at the altar nor into the treasury. This custom was grounded upon the rule of our Lord (Matt. v, 23). Further, all open enmity and quarrelling, *strife*, envy, and contention, were punished with excommunication, as tendencies towards, and lower degrees of murder.¹⁵

Thus, the result of strife is discord among brethren who should be one (John 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; Rom. 12:20).

Strife brings division. Discussing “Christian Union,” Van Dyke wrote:

A similar train of thought may be indulged with respect to the actual divisions in the Church of God. They *ought* never to have happened. They never *would* have happened had it not been for the pride, the prejudices, the selfishness, and the ambition of depraved man.¹⁶

Strife runs with this pack of carnal companions, as noted above, pride, prejudice, and depraved ambition. Let there be no doubt, strife drives the wedge which splits churches, divides brethren, weakens God’s people, and emboldens the workers of iniquity. The “factious feelings roused on behalf of this cause and that; such sentiments are likely to eventuate inÉdivisions.”¹⁷ Paul wrote:

Now I beseech you, brethren, 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).

A factious party spirit does not promote unity, as Jesus desires, but bursts asunder the good and pleasant oneness of saints (Psm. 133:1-3). It is not enough to hear the truth; we must obey the truth. It is not enough to begin by faith; we must consistently continue by faith. It is not enough to wear the name of Christ; we must live like Christ. Carroll commented:

He (Paul, BL) is saying to them, “You must not make the mistake that by mere intellectual perception of doctrinal truth you have therefore exercised the faith of the gospel.” We may put it down as settled that no religion is worth a cent that does not make a man better than he was before; a son a better son, a father a better father, a mother a better mother, a daughter a better daughter.¹⁸

Strife sows seeds of enmity. It is listed with sins which are “violations of brotherly love.”¹⁹ It is the “factious opposition to others” as noted in Philippians 2:3, and it “denotes those who set themselves in factious opposition to the truth” (Rom. 2:8).²⁰ One man’s (or one group’s) menacing, malicious ambition begets the contentious wrangling which true Christians detest. Strife separates friends and brethren, polarizing them into opposing camps, sweeping all (if brethren are not careful) into a church-wide quarrel where brethren choose sides and fight each other. Strife, like a black hole, pulls in energy which should be used in doing the work of the church; thus, it saps the strength of the church, discourages the weak and newly converted, and blemishes and stains the Lord’s body (Eph. 5:23-27). Lambert gave the following illustration.

A farmer was riding along the road in his wagon and his dog was following along panting with his tongue hanging out. A neighbor accosted the farmer: “Aren’t you ashamed to ride in an empty wagon with your dog following along so tired and hot?” The farmer replied: “That dog ain’t tired from following, it’s his zig-zagging that made him tired. He ain’t missed a puddle hole nor a hollow tree since we left town.” It is not our following Christ that causes strife and sin in the church but our “zig-zagging.” We detour after too many sinful things.²¹

Strife will keep one out of the kingdom. We love to sing, “How beautiful heaven must be,” and, “There’s a land that is fairer than day.” How we long for that perfect place of peace and rest, forever to dwell with God and the good of all ages! Truly, if we miss heaven, we miss it all. Yet, who will keep men from heaven if not themselves? Strife, this sinful course of man’s own choosing, this wicked work of the flesh, will close the doors of heaven to its practitioners, barring them forever from entrance into the “land of fadeless day.” Of what value will the stroking of one’s ego in this life be when he finds himself, in the life to come, in the eternal punishment of hell? As Clarke wrote:

They are not the *children* of God, and therefore cannot inherit the kingdom which belongs only to the *children* of the Divine *family*.²²

Read again, Galatians 5:19-20.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, *strife*, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: *of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God* (Gal. 5:19-20, emph. BL).

Now, consider the comments of McGarvey and Pendleton:

These sins are too well known to need analysis or comment. It is startling to find “factions, divisions, parties,” in so black a list, and coupled with so clear a declaration that these sins exclude the perpetrator of them from the kingdom of God. Verily all professing Christians would do well to take heed to what the Bible designates as sins, and not trust too much to their own fallible sentiments and judgment in such matters.²³

Who would want to go to heaven if there, throughout eternity, would be the problem of strife; if the heavenly home were divided into warring factions led by hostile aggressors; if contentions were on every hand? Rest assured, there will be no strife there, nor will those who practice such be there (Rev. 21:27). Barnes wrote:

They *cannot* enter into the kingdom of heaven as they are. Nor is it *desirable* that they should. What would heaven be if filled with adulterers, and fornicators, and idolaters, with the proud and envious, and with murderers, and drunkards? To call such a place *heaven*, would be an abuse of the word. No one could wish to dwell there; and such men *cannot* enter into heaven.²⁴

Lipscomb and Shepherd also stated, after citing Ezekiel 3:17-19:

Whatever may be the relation of men to the church, however their profession of faith in Christ, they shall not, if their works are such as he has just enumerated, be admitted into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:11). Their very characters unfit them for that kingdom. Moreover they are rebels against the government of God.²⁵

HOW STRIFE WORKS TO THE HARM OF THE LORD’S PEOPLE

From experience and observation, these points come to the forefront when considering strife. First, some brethren, though embarking on a noble course of life, even of preaching the Gospel, and, no doubt, with sincere and lofty motivation at the first, fail to grow in knowledge, and/or to practice what they do know; that is, they do not mature spiritually. Thus, they may have the position and the voice of leadership or preaching, but their hearts lack the key constants of selflessness and humble service as Christ exemplified. As such, they allow sin to overtake them, or they pursue it until they overtake it! They become contentious (Rom. 2:8), and lose sight of the need to seek peace and ensue (pursue) it (1 Pet. 3:11). Through time, they become exalted in their own thinking though not as highly exalted in the thinking of others (as they believe they should be), and they begin to feel slighted. Observing others in positions which they desire, and for which they consider themselves equally, if not far better, suited, they allow themselves to become bitter. Their bitterness is the glue which binds them with others of the same kind.

Second, their spiritual immaturity progresses to spiritual atrophy. While their knowledge may increase over time, there is an inverse ratio of proper application in their personal lives. They come to be known for their lack of spirituality; thus, for their carnality, and, sometimes, even anger-driven radicalism. Sound brethren, seeing (or sensing) this anomaly, cease to use them in meetings and lectures which, in turn, exacerbates their bitterness, intensifies their determination to be well-known, sought-after, and much used, and precipitates their complaint of “church politics.” Instead of honest self-examination resulting in repentance and reformation of life, and in order to cover their own deficiency, and to denigrate others, they find the devil’s old tool of unjust criticism of others. Lacking the ethics which Christians should incorporate, they learn how half-truths, innuendo, and insinuation can cause the gullible to look with suspicion on the faithful. As they seek to bring down the humble servants and stalwart soldiers of the cross, they think themselves uplifted. They join in “factious opposition” to true Gospel preachers.²⁶ Lipscomb and Shepherd stated it thusly:

Acts of contention to which enmities lead. [This is seen in church troubles, when men take opposite sides, not so much from different convictions, as from personal dislike and the disposition to thwart an opponent.]²⁷

Third, opposition to their increasingly wicked lives, malicious railings, and deceitful workings, instead of prompting their repentance, as it should, infuriates them. They scour the brotherhood to find others likeminded, and bind themselves together in opposition to their hated enemies. Their wrathful response knows almost no bounds. Since their inflated egos blind them, they cannot be wrong, and their ungodly friends cannot be wrong, seemingly, regardless of what they do or how they do it. Thus, they declare all out war against their perceived enemies, under the name of saving the church, and rejoice to be leaders of something even if it is a band of carnal misfits.

Fourth, some unsuspecting brethren, drawn in by these workers of strife who play on their sincere desire for purity of the church, become opponents of faithful brethren and of good works without really knowing why—except that some preachers whom they admire, or who are their friends are against them. They join, advance, and support a sect whose reason for existence is the hateful opposition intent on destruction of some brother, some paper, some school, or some church. Anyone who touches anyone who touched one of their enemies immediately becomes himself an enemy. As Zerr wrote, concerning strife, “It describes one who is determined to win, by fair means or foul.”²⁸

Finally, the tragic consequences are: brethren divide, churches split, good brethren and good works lose support, and souls will be lost. The world sees brethren in strife, and they look elsewhere to try to find God’s people. Everybody loses and Satan wins. All of this is because of fleshly, sinful, self-seeking, self-serving, self-loving, arrogant, ambitious self-promotion.

CONCLUSION

“Self-pre-occupation, self-broodiness, self-interest, self-love—these are the reasons why you go jarring against your fellows.”²⁹ Brethren, every moment spent in contentious striving is a moment forever lost to peace. Every example of ambitious self-promotion is a vote for division and against unity, for Satan and against God, for the world and against the church, for hell and against heaven.

Let us beware of strife, and overcome such fleshly desires with obedience to the Word of God evidenced by faithful living in, and like, Christ (Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20). Let us flee from even the semblance of such sin in fear of losing heaven. Let us not allow it to linger in our thinking, but rush such thoughts from our minds with an “It is written” (cf. Mat. 4; Psm. 119:11). If we give an eye for an eye, we may end up blind. Instead, let us first conquer our own minds, bringing ourselves into subjection to our Lord, then conquer our enemies with love.

As Jesus proclaimed, the way up is down (Luke 14:11). Thus, our ambition should be to be faithful servants (Josh. 1:2; Luke 19:17). Our Lord stated this truth:

But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:26-28).

Remember, when confronting strife, error does not become truth just because it fills one’s factious desires, nor because he angrily, loudly shouts it. The threat of strife may silence the timid, but it does not solve the problem; it only creates more and greater problems. Let us all determine to stand for what is right with the right spirit. Standing for right may have a high price, but it pays richly—for it is never wrong to do right, nor is it ever right to do wrong.

ENDNOTES

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