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# Fulton County Gospel News

*Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World*

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## CRITICISMS ABOUT THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Part One

By Ted J. Clarke

### INTRODUCTION

Criticisms about the church of Christ have been made since the church was established on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ from the dead (Acts 2:1-47). First, even though it was true, the Jews did not want to be blamed for Christ's death (Acts 2:22-24; 5:28 et al.). Neither did the Jewish authorities like the fact that the apostles were preaching to the masses a religion that taught matters contrary to their traditional beliefs – “*Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine. . . they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus*” (Acts 5:28, 40).

Second, the apostles were also condemned by the non-Jewish people (Gentiles). They were accused of “*teach[ing] customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans*” (Acts 16:21). Like the Jews, the pagan authorities complained of the teaching of the principles of Christ's faith to the common people, saying, “*this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands*” (Acts 19:26).

Third, even religious people who accepted to some degree the faith of Christ were guilty of religious error and became critics of the apostles' teaching. Such people perverted the gospel and caused divisions in the

church (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; Galatians 1:6-9; 2:4-5). Some criticized the person of the apostle Paul, saying, “*his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible*” (2 Corinthians 10:10).

Therefore, criticism of the Lord's church or its faithful members is nothing new. How shall we handle such criticism? First, we ought to listen to those who criticize and examine their criticisms for any validity. Second, once we understand the criticism we must examine it in the light of God's word and make necessary corrections. Third, if there are Scriptures that negate the criticism, rendering it invalid, we should try to demonstrate that to the critics. There are those who may be insincere in their criticisms and they have no desire to investigate the Scriptures. There were those in the apostles' day who were of such a nature. Some of the Jews in Thessalonica demonstrated their insincerity (Acts 17:1-10). However, when Paul went into Berea into the synagogue of the Jews it is said, “*Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:11). It is those noble souls who are willing to search the Scriptures, those of good and honest hearts, that we seek to answer in these articles

(Matthew 13:23; Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15).

### MEMBERS OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST ALWAYS WANT TO ARGUE ABOUT RELIGION

Although this is the way the criticism is generally phrased, I would say that there are some in the church (but not enough) who want to **discuss** what the Bible says about salvation, worship, the church and other essential matters with those in denominational religion and unbelievers in the world. This motivation to discuss these matters with others does not stem from a desire to argue about religion. Rather, it comes from an understanding that it does make a difference what one believes about such matters and that people are going to be lost if they believe and act upon a lie rather than the truth of Scripture (John 8:31-32).

We have an obligation to respond to those who question what we believe and practice in churches of Christ. First, people are lost without the gospel (John 8:24; Mark 16:15-16; Romans 1:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Second, we are told, “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear*” (1 Peter 3:15). To “give an answer” means to present a reasoned defense of one's faith, to demonstrate from the Scriptures the truthfulness of what one believes and practices. This is what the apostle

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TED J. CLARKE .....EDITOR  
Phone .....(870) 625-3217  
Fax .....(870) 625-3137  
E-Mail .....cocfcgn@ozarks.com

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Paul did as he went about preaching and teaching. *“And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days **reasoned with them out of the scriptures**, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. . .And he **reasoned** in the synagogue every sabbath, **and persuaded** the Jews and the Greeks. . .And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and **reasoned with the Jews**. . .And he went into the synagogue, and **spoke boldly** for the space of three months, **disputing and persuading** the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, **disputing daily** in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 17:2-3, 18:4, 19; 19:8-10). The Scriptures were and*

are the standard by which all religion must be judged (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3).

**It is not just religion that matters but the truth about religion!** Look at this passage. *“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3, NKJV). First, the word “contend” in this passage has a strong meaning, “to contend about a thing, as a combatant” (Vine’ Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). Christians are in a battle against religious error and we must engage those that propagate it (Ephesians 6:12-17; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Second, that faith was “once for all” given. These truths would never change or be modified by so-called modern latter day revelations as if from God. No council or creed book has any say at all over God’s word. No religious denomination nor all the denominations combined have that power to nullify God’s word.*

Jesus contended with those in religious error frequently. Read Matthew, chapters 21-23 and note the number of times the Lord opposed those of the Jewish religion who were straying from the truth. He even told those who called Him Lord not to think that was all they had to do. *“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21-23).*

Therefore, desiring to discuss Scriptural matters with those with whom we differ is not a practice to be

criticized, for it has the blessing of the Lord and the apostles. Here is a reminder to all of us to “contend earnestly,” but to do so “with meekness and fear,” “speaking the truth in love” (Jude 3; 1 Peter 3:15; Ephesians 4:15). One might be properly criticized for not contending for the faith in the proper spirit, but do not criticize someone for contending for the faith!

Most members of denominational groups do not want to reason from the Scriptures because they do not know what the Scriptures teach and they cannot defend their beliefs. It used to be that nearly every member of churches of Christ knew the Scriptures well and could show their religious neighbors book, chapter and verse which corrected their religious errors. To our shame that is no more the case. We have a great number of Christians who do not have the courage to teach the people of the world and their religious neighbors the truth of God’s word, because they do not know God’s word well enough to do so. They do not know how because they do not study the Scriptures with a view to teaching the lost. As long as this situation continues the church will not carry out its mission of evangelizing the world (Matthew 28:18-20).

[Continued next month. We will discuss the criticism often leveled against the church – “Members of the church of Christ believe they are the only ones going to be saved.”]

## WITHDRAWAL OF FELLOWSHIP

### Corrective Discipline in the New Testament

(Part One)

By Ted J. Clarke

**INTRODUCTION**

In response to several requests we begin this series on withdrawal of fellowship. There are a number of

reasons prompting this study, which we will elaborate in the course of the study, but the following are keys. The purposes of withdrawing fellowship from the erring are to: (1) save the erring one, encouraging repentance; (2) save the church, keeping it pure; (3) save ourselves, as a warning; (4) save the world, showing God's righteous way.

Batsell Barrett Baxter once remarked, "Discipline is a word which is particularly out of step with our time. Ours is a permissive, indulgent age. It is an age emphasizing no controls, no restraints and no limitations. . . [O]ne of the greatest needs of our day is discipline." Brother Baxter made that statement about thirty years ago and the sad truth of what he said has only been multiplied over the years.

## BREAK DOWN IN RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY

Discipline begins in the home. Parents ought to set the example for their children, honoring and respecting the authority of the law; God's law and the nation's civil law. When parents are permissive, allowing open rebellion and disrespect for the authority of God's word and civil law, providing no constructive guidance and restraint, then the basic unit of society (the home) is affected. "*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it*" (Proverbs 22:6). "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:1-4). "*Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord*" (Colossians 3:20). For commandments on obeying civil law see Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-

17.

Lack of discipline in the home leads to a national disaster. When there is no respect for authority in the home, by parents or children, it affects the nation. When there is no respect for law and authority anarchy and criminal activity abound. Law-breakers are often arrested and then released on technicalities. Punitive laws are repealed. Those who are convicted often receive just a slap on the hand. "*In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes*" (Judges 21:25). "*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil*" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). "*Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people*" (Proverbs 14:34).

Lack of discipline in the church also multiplies problems and brings reproach upon the Lord's Body (Ephesians 1:21-23). When sin goes unchecked it spreads like leaven in bread dough (1 Corinthians 5:6). The Bible's teaching on withdrawal of fellowship from erring members is often ignored or ridiculed. Many elders and church leaders are afraid to "hurt someone's feelings" or fear they "will run someone away from the church," so they do little or nothing to discipline immoral or disorderly brethren. There are at least three dangers in the church regarding this problem: (1) weak elderships/leaders who are worried about popularity, church budgets, numbers, etc. and refuse to allow preaching on this subject or will not take the lead in carrying out this command; (2) compromising preachers who have no backbone and fear for their jobs, refusing to preach on any controversial topics, especially withdrawal of fellowship; and (3) unconverted members who refuse to follow the whole counsel of God. That is, they refuse to practice and observe proper church discipline, threatening to leave if such is done. The result in

such cases is that often brethren will do what they want without any fear that anyone will approach them or rebuke them for their sins. None of these groups have the real courage to do God's will – they only do what they agree with, which means they are placing themselves above God! Think about that!

## TWO SIDES OF DISCIPLINE

Webster's Dictionary says that discipline in general is "that which is taught to pupils; training which corrects, molds, strengthens, perfects; chastisement, punishment." **Preventive** discipline teaches one the proper way to conduct one's life, to avoid corrective discipline (cf. Matthew 28:20; 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Peter 2:11-12). **Corrective** discipline seeks to warn and punish if necessary. It is when people reject preventive discipline that corrective measures become necessary. Withdrawal of fellowship is only a part of the corrective discipline process, so there will be matters we must consider before we discuss the actual withdrawal.

## CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE IS COMMANDED BY CHRIST

First, Jesus Himself gave an example of how to handle the aspect of personal offenders who refuse to repent. "*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican*" (Matthew 18:15-17). We will discuss this further in these studies.

*continued from page 3*

Second, withdrawal is commanded “in the name of Christ,” that is, by His authority. This is not a light matter! *“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you”* (2 Thessalonians 3:6-7). Ask yourselves this – how can Christians refuse to carry out a command that Scripture says to do in Christ’s name!  
[continued next month]

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– Ted J. Clarke, Editor

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**GOD’S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP**

**- COLOSSIANS 3:17**

1. **LORD’S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God’s word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men’s doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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