
Words of Truth

Poisonous "Brethren"

By: Brian A. Yeager

God warns us of false brethren. He repeatedly tells us that they will try to be among us in a hidden manner. He says this: *"But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you... Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Galatians 2:3-5 and Jude 1:3-4).

When we talk of Scriptures like those quoted above we often make applications to false brethren who will bring in false doctrines. Such is certainly a correct application contextually and otherwise (I Timothy 1:3-7). However, false doctrine is not the only thing that false brethren can bring in among the saints. Consider for a moment that false brethren may not overtly teach error or contradict the truth. What about the power of influence? Doesn't God warn us that the influence of the ungodly is powerful in destroying the souls of the faithful (Proverbs 13:20 and I Corinthians 15:33)?

Think for a moment how other things, beyond false doctrine, can become contagious. For example, faithful Christians are supposed to be joyous (Galatians 5:22, Philippians 4:4, and I Peter 1:7-8). Faithful Christians are people who do all things without murmurings [grumble, complain] (Philippians 2:14-16). What happens though when you are around people professing to be Christians who do nothing but complain and grumble? What happens to your joy when you are with someone who has no joy? You see, it is not just false teaching that can poison our minds and works for the Lord. Any bad influence can bring us to err. Thus, one brother or sister who is not right with the Lord can be poison for us all.

It Just Takes One Individual To Poison The Flock

God says this: *"Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good"* (Ecclesiastes 9:18). In Corinth, there was a man who committed fornication. He was not teaching, from a public pulpit, that fornication was okay. He was just guilty of the act. Notice what is written concerning him: *"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so*

done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (I Corinthians 5:1-13).

What more needs to be said concerning this? Isn't it clear that one individual can be a deadly poison to us all (Galatians 5:7-9)? There is no argument here to be had. More Scriptures could be cited, but what more needs to be proven? Thus, let's move to another consideration. Let's do some self-examination.

Are You Poison?

God wants us to regularly examine ourselves (Lamentations 3:40, Ezekiel 18:27-28, Haggai 1:5, and II Corinthians 13:5). If we Scripturally find ourselves to be lacking, He expects us to change immediately (Psalms 119:59-60). To correctly examine ourselves we have to make sure we are honestly doing so. Don't practice self-deception (Psalms 10:4-6, Proverbs 21:2, Proverbs 30:12-13, I Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 6:3-4, II Timothy 3:13, and James 1:21-25).

Having reviewed those principles, ask yourself if you are good for others or bad for others to be around. What kind of influence do you bring? Can you tell people to follow your example (I Corinthians 11:1)? Can you say that your manner of life (II Timothy 3:10) is flawless (I Thessalonians 2:10)? If not, what will happen if someone acts like you act? If not, what will happen if someone talks like you talk? If someone follows your example, where will that get them when they stand before the Lord in the Judgment Day? If it will NOT get them to Heaven, doesn't that make you poisonous? What should you do about that (I Corinthians 11:31-32 and James 4:6-10)?

Conclusion

Generally, when you think of a poisonous item, such cannot be changed. With thanks to God, we should delight in the fact that poisonous people can become pure. Through proper conversion back to Christ (James 5:19-20), a poisonous brother or sister who is fallen can turn from darkness back to the light (Acts 26:18-20). As we read of the fornicator in Corinth, the unchanged individual has to be withdrawn from before others fall into that individual's same condemned state (II Thessalonians 3:6). However, the goal of lessons such as these is to prevent us from becoming poisonous. If you find that you are poisonous, STOP! Ask for help from the faithful around you. If you won't stop, go to Hell by yourself. Don't poison others.