
Words of Truth

“They’ll Stop Practicing It...”

By: Brian A. Yeager

The Scriptures tell us that we cannot be in fellowship with those who teach and/or practice error (Psalms 1:1-2, Psalms 26:4-5, Jeremiah 15:17, Romans 16:17-18, Ephesians 5:11, II John 9-11, and Revelation 2:14-16). Yet, people try to find ways to work and worship with congregations in error.

We have seen people twist the fourteenth chapter of the book of Romans. They ignore that the chapter authorizes brethren to differ on matters of AUTHORIZED liberties. In other words, if you won’t eat swine that is your choice and not eating it is fine with God (I Corinthians 8:8). On the other hand, God is also pleased if I choose to eat swine (Acts 10:9-16). I should not force my eating of swine on my brother who does not want to eat it nor should he force his choice on me (Romans 14:1-3). The very moment I that teach it is wrong to eat that which God says I may eat, I have taught a doctrine of demons (I Timothy 4:1-5). That is the principle which Romans 14:1-23 teaches. Romans 14:1-23 does not teach unity in diversity, for that is contrary to the entirety of God’s word. In these matters of liberty we are to be unified in believing and teaching that they are liberties.

Outside of the abuse of Romans chapter fourteen people also try to justify worshipping with those in error by arguing what is and what is not a “fellowship issue”. Brethren, the phrase “fellowship issue” NEVER appears in the word of God. Yet, you’ll have some who will say that error on divorce and remarriage is not a “fellowship issue”. How can someone twist Matthew 19:3-9, Mark 10:10-12, Romans 7:1-6, I Corinthians 7:10-11, etc. and have brethren ignore their errors? Such cannot be done Scripturally. Others will worship with congregations that abuse the Lord’s Supper and say that it is not a “fellowship issue”. Amazingly, some can watch the Lord’s Supper be served as a “make-up” Supper and not have a problem with that even though it violates Scriptures such as I Corinthians 11:23-33. Yet, those same folks would go nuts if they saw people violating Acts 20:7 to observe the Lord’s Supper on a Tuesday night. Why is one part of the Lord’s Supper so important (the first day of the week), but other aspects are not “fellowship issues” (partaking of it together as a local congregation)? The answer is obvious; these so-called “brethren” have their own list of what is important and what is not.

There is no inspired list of errors we can ignore and errors we must contend with. Any violation of God’s word is equally wrong (James 2:10-12). God demands that we withdraw ourselves from all manner of sin and false teachings. Notice: *“If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, where of cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself”* (I Timothy 6:3-5). Yet, when some consider these truths, they find another way to seek out a loophole. They say that they’ll stop practicing this or that so that more people can worship with them. Let’s consider this error.

What If They'll Stop The Practice?

I have known many brethren who have fallen for this proposal. In one particular situation there was a congregation that included social entertainment as a part of the work of that local church. To be specific, they had a "fellowship hall" and they had monthly "potluck dinners" in that fellowship hall. The church there also hosted weddings, funerals, birthday parties, etc. A man looking for brethren to work and worship with scheduled a study with the preacher and elders of that congregation. From what he told me, he studied with them about how there was no authority for the works they were engaging in as a congregation. They differed greatly, even on the fact that you need authority for everything that you say and do (cf. Isaiah 8:20, Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 4:4, Luke 6:46, Ephesians 5:10, Colossians 3:17, I Thessalonians 5:21, and II Timothy 1:13).

In the studies with the preacher and elders, this man pressed them on several Scriptures. Amongst those Scriptures, he asked them to explain how they could argue for social matters to be a work of the local church in light of a few things. He pressed this preacher and the elders to explain how Romans 14:17 shows eating food is not a work of the kingdom, but they were making it such. They could not answer. He asked them how they could ignore that these matters are explicitly stated to be the work of individual Christians (Romans 12:13, I Corinthians 11:22; 34, and I Peter 4:9). They could not answer. As the discussions progressed, several other members of that congregation became involved in these studies. A lack of confidence in their practices caused the elders to decide that they would stop these things. HOWEVER, they said they would not say that these things were wrong. In fact, they stated that they wanted to keep "studying" the matter.

What do you think occurred? Do you think that a congregation that completely ignored authority on these things was practicing authority on other things? This occurred near Atlanta, GA. I advised the man who was studying with these folks NOT to work or worship with them UNLESS they completely repented of ALL of their errors (Proverbs 28:13, Ezekiel 14:6, and Acts 26:20). I remember telling this man that Pharaoh tried a similar tactic with Moses, Aaron, and Israel; but he ultimately did not repent (Exodus 9:27-35). So, what happened? This man called me a year later. He said he had to leave because they were supporting human institutions out of the treasury. They also went back to many of their social practices as a congregation.

EVEN IF this congregation did not return to these practices, it was still wrong for this man and his family to join them. The Scriptures plainly state that we must be in unity not only in practice, but also in our thinking (Jeremiah 32:39, I Corinthians 1:10, II Corinthians 13:11, Philippians 1:27, Philippians 2:2, Philippians 3:16, and I Peter 3:8). The fact that this congregation was divided in thought was enough to steer clear of them. We must never join others in their errors (I Timothy 5:22).

Conclusion

True repentance certainly involves the ceasing of sinful practices (Matthew 3:8). However, it also includes the changing of the thinking that brought about those sinful practices (Isaiah 55:6-7 and Acts 8:21-22; cf. Psalms 66:18). Your mind is where your actions originate (Matthew 15:17-20). One cannot just clean up the sinful action and allow the sinful thought to remain (Luke 11:39-40).