

Words of Truth

“Leave There Thy Gift...”

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When brethren have discussions about threats among the saints it is often false doctrine that becomes the focal point of those discussions. False doctrine is and always has been a great threat to Christians (I Timothy 1:3-7). Those who tolerate false doctrine and false teachers are in error (II John 9-11 and Revelation 2:20). Thus, it is reasonable that we talk about false teachers and false doctrine as major threats to God’s people. This is especially true because those who teach error often try to be sneaky about it (Matthew 7:15-20, Romans 16:17-18, II Corinthians 11:12-15, Galatians 2:1-5, II Peter 2:1-3, and Jude 3-4).

False doctrine can destroy individual Christians (I Timothy 1:19-20). False doctrine can destroy an entire local church (Revelation 2:14-16). False doctrine can even destroy congregations in an area of the world (Galatians 1:1-8, Galatians 3:1, and Galatians 5:7-9). However, there are more threats to brethren than just false doctrine.

One of the threats, among many others, is conflict among saints. Not all conflict among brethren comes from or relates to someone being a false teacher. Sometimes problems among brethren come from things like miscommunication, assumptions, unreasonable expectations, dishonesty, etc. Sometimes problems creep up among saints because of long held grudges. Sometimes problems arise among saints because of carnal relationships that stem from issues such as family feuds. These threats are, at times, more difficult to discern than false teaching and even more destructive to the peace and harmony of God’s people. When these problems are unresolved souls are lost and the unity of the saints is destroyed. Thus, the title of our lesson comes into the discussion.

You Cannot Properly Worship God With Unresolved Issues Lingered Between Saints

Notice what the Scriptures teach us: *“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift”* (Matthew 5:23-24). We should all realize that, under the Law of Christ, we do not come before a physical altar in our worship to God (John 4:23-24 and Philippians 3:3). The temple of God is no longer a physical building on earth. We are the spiritual temple of the living God (II Corinthians 6:16 and I Peter 2:5). The altar we offer our spiritual sacrifices on is a spiritual altar in Heaven (cf. Revelation 14:13-18). Now, let’s make some applications.

We have read that God does not want us to worship Him when we have unresolved issues with our brethren. Jesus established that when a brother has a problem with you, you’re not supposed to wait for that problem to “work itself out”. Some have addressed Jesus’ teaching here with the old “we’re working on the problem” type of answer. That is not what Jesus instructed. He instructed us to be reconciled with

the brother we are at odds with **before** we can come before God in worship. If you reread Matthew 5:23-24 you'll also notice that Jesus does not want us to wait for our brethren to come to us with their problem. We are expected, when we know a Christian is at odds with one of us, to go to them about it.

Brethren, we cannot assemble in a manner that pleases God if we are not unified (I Corinthians 1:10, Philippians 2:2, Philippians 3:16, and I Peter 3:8). God expects there to be peace between brethren (Mark 9:50 and II Corinthians 13:11). With unresolved conflict among saints true unity and peace does not exist. Furthermore, when any Christian has a problem with another it is a sin not to deal with it.

We Are Commanded To Resolve Problems Amongst Brethren

Notice these Scriptures: *“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... Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him... Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ... Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye... Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins”* (Matthew 18:15-17, Luke 17:3-4, Galatians 6:1-2, Colossians 3:13, and James 5:19-20).

We cannot be vague in approaching the erring. We are not instructed to hint to a problem, but to “tell him his fault”. When a problem needs resolved and a faithful Christian is involved, things are said very plainly (Acts 8:13-24, Galatians 2:11-17, and I Timothy 5:20; cf. Proverbs 27:5). Those that teach and preach can easily be guilty of indirectly dealing with problems with brethren. It is easy to blur the lines between correcting error in preaching (II Timothy 4:2) and dealing with a troubled Christian. Even for us preachers, we are expected to be DIRECT in dealing with erring brethren. One cannot preach a sermon and walk away with the “I told him or her” mindset. Remember, open rebuke is better than secret love (Proverbs 27:5). We cannot expect people to understand indirect methods of correction. When a father spans a child he does not do so by spanking someone else (Proverbs 23:13).

Problems often occur among brethren because of the way something seems. We are to be people of evidence, not assumption (Proverbs 18:13 and John 7:24). Someone not calling you or visiting you does not mean there is a problem. If it is a problem for you, ask that brother or sister in Christ to spend time with you. Don't create a problem when there isn't one.

Conclusion

If you find that you are at odds with a brother or sister in Christ you have to fix that problem. We cannot approach God when these conflicts exist. We can't approach our Heavenly Father if we have sin in our lives (I Timothy 2:8). So, let's be sure to clearly resolve all conflicts when they arise. If you have a problem with a fellow saint, leave your gift and resolve that conflict before you approach God again.