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"Fellowship" Then And Now

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Striking similarities are observable between the apostasy of the latter half of the nineteenth century and the apostasy of the latter half of the twentieth century. Of particular interest here is the misuse or abuse of the word, "fellowship," which is common to both apostasies.

Then and now refusal to fellowship is interpreted as consigning to hell the ones to whom fellowship is refused. Brother Srygley was challenged to say if all who used instrumental music in the worship would be lost. Brother Srygley replied to the effect that the Lord was the judge. Only the Lord is able to cast into hell. Brother Srygley would not presume to function in the capacity the Lord had reserved exclusively for himself. Brother Srygley preached the word and contended for the faith, but refused to be maneuvered into a position of presuming to act as either lawgiver or judge. "One only is the lawgiver and judge, even he who is able to save and to destroy...." (James 4:12). On the other hand, no man has the right to extend clemency; that too, is a power and right reserved by the Lord to himself.

Formerly, it was a popular trick, of some "digressive" preachers, to try to get those who opposed the instrument to affirm in debate that those who worshipped with a mechanical instrument were going to hell. Plenty of brethren were willing to affirm the sinfulness of such worship and refused to fellowship those who did use the instrument in worship, but I am happy that only a few were willing to affirm the prejudicial proposition proposed. God alone has the right to assign the eternal destiny of any one. When will

people learn that refusal to fellowship those in error and sin does not necessarily stem from bitterness, hatred, malice, or any other unworthy motive. Refusal to fellowship does not demonstrate a lack of love.

Another thing that calls for earnest thought is the ambiguous and equivocal use made of the word, "fellowship." When I say that I will not fellowship those who promote and participate in sponsoring church arrangements, instrumental music in worship, eating or endorsing eating the Lord's supper on any day other than the first day of the week, what do I mean? Some evidently think I mean that I will have nothing to do with them. Such is not true, for then I "must needs go out of the world." Such would require the "hermit soul" attitude and behaviour. I have hunted, gone fishing and engaged in social and business activities with people that I **did not fellowship!** But if I engaged in any activity or expressed sentiment that would give comfort or encouragement to those in error, I would be doing wrong. Any time my participating in any activity can be fairly construed as endorsement of sin or even giving comfort to those in sin, I jeopardize my soul.

My refusal to announce meetings of "institutional" churches, without explanation of my disagreement with them, cannot be properly construed as ugly or evidence of lack of love—it is rather because of my "love of the truth."

As we "follow after peace with all men," we need to be constantly alert to avoid jeopardizing our "sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Regardless of how much "good will" I may have built up among my fellows, if can never serve as a substitute for the "separateness" which the Lord requires. If I call on a brother, who endorses and promotes human organizations, such as the sponsoring church, to lead prayer, there is the very real danger that some will decide that I am not consistent.

Scriptural fellowship YES, endorsement or encouragement to error, NO! **END**



RANDY HARSHBARGER

In Revelation 2:2-3, the apostle John commends the church at Ephesus for the good, commendable traits found there. Then in verse 4, he identifies a problem that was present in this church. "But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love." Inasmuch as individual Christians comprise a congregation in any given locality and when individual Christians leave their first love, the local congregation is necessarily affected, we will focus our attention on members of the local church. The fact that many members of the Lord's church leave their first love cannot be denied. Let us accept this as being true, try to determine why this happens, and then offer some positive reasons for returning to the Lord.

What Is Our First Love?

We would do well to consider briefly what our first love is. Our first love is the fervent love for the Lord and His work. Our first love is our love for His word and the desire to help the church grow and our desire to grow spiritually as we discharge our respective duties as Christians and workers for the Lord. The church at Ephesus' first love is found in vs. 2 and 3, and would involve their love for the Lord and His word. These are the works they were to continue doing after having repented (vs. 5). Notice the following from *Albert Barnes*:

The love here referred to is evidently love to the Saviour; and the idea is, that, as a church, they had less of this than formerly characterized them . . . Individual Christians often lose much of their first love (Notes on the New Testament, One Volume, pg. 1553).

The church at Ephesus had not altogether forsaken the Lord but had lost their fervent desire to work for the Lord which had characterized them in times past and which had resulted in their being a strong church. We will consider three other causes that enter into one's leaving his first love.

Why Do Some Leave?

Many members of the church leave their first love because God ceases to be the object of their *faith*. A person's faith in God and His promises begins to erode and the God of heaven is no longer the One they turn to in time of joy or trouble. They no longer feel any need to petition God in prayer asking for wisdom and guidance to run the Christian race. While trying to live each day to it's fullest, instead of making worthwhile contributions as Christians, they seek for the things that will vanish away. Spiritual matters are replaced with material things, and they fail to remember that God is the giver of all

things, both good and perfect. One no longer feels a sense of responsibility to God and begins to feel he can get along without Him (Pro. 16:25; Jer. 10:23). They have no root and their faith is temporary (Luke 8:13). Their faith in God has all but vanished, and they leave their first love.

Also, various members of the church leave their first love because they lack love for Christ and His commandments. We must dwell and meditate upon the word of God (Psa. 1:1-2). Christ said, "If ye love me, ye will **keep** my commandments" (John 14:15). Christ obeyed His father because He loved Him. If we love Christ we will keep His commandments. Doing the will of Christ should be of supreme importance to every Christian. A lack of love for Christ is seen in our refusal to obey His will. Many people reject the teaching of Christ. This is evident by the lives they lead. Just as the Galatian Christians were removing themselves from the gospel of Christ, (Gal. 1:6-9), many Christians do the same thing today. It is a gradual process and not something that happens overnight. Because one's love for the Lord is waning, a midweek Bible class might be missed. Next, a Sunday night service, and finally it is easy to stay home Sunday morning. The television stays on when one should be studying the Bible. Instead of a zealous attitude toward Christ and His word, apathy sets in and finally a person has removed himself completely from the gospel of Christ. He has left his first love.

The third reason (there are many more) a person leaves his first love is that he has little or no concern for his spiritual welfare and ultimately his final reward, be it heaven or hell. Of course, this is the logical consequence and attitude that stems from the reasons mentioned previously. Yet, many fail to realize the seriousness and importance of living a life that is dedicated to serving the Lord. A person takes thought only for tomorrow, failing to consider the fact that, should the Lord come tomorrow, he would stand before God having failed to keep His commandments. He would reap as he has sown and would receive a just reward (Eph. 6:7-8; Matt. 25:46). Thinking he has time to live as he wants and serve the Lord later, spiritual matters are laid aside for a season, possibly for eternity (Matt. 25:13).

Let Us Remain Faithful

How can we remain faithful to God and guard against leaving our first love? First, let us renew our faith in God each day, by trusting in Him and His word. Study each day and take comfort in the fact that God is ". . . not willing that any should perish . . ." (2 Peter 3:9). He has given us His word so we might have faith in Him and therefore have eternal life (John 20:30-31). Secondly, let us remember daily the death of Christ on the cross for our sins and then press on in the work He has given us to do through His word. He died that we might live, but our life in Him is dependent upon obedience to His word. Thirdly, let us realize the value of our souls and then prepare ourselves to spend eternity with God and His Son. We cannot die right unless we live right. Let us not leave our first love.

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THERE OUGHT TO BE A LAW

ERNEST A. FINLEY

Many times I have heard folk say, when particularly troubled by some action or circumstance contrary to their liking, "Man — there oughta be a law!" Often, if the person making this statement would check the matter out, he would find that there already is one. For example:

There is a law against being a sluggard, a dead-beat or a bum. There is a law against folk living as parasites off the industrious segment of society. Men who have healthy bodies and minds, with ample opportunity to find gainful employment, should not be signed up on the relief-rolls of the state. Some families, to the second or third generation, have learned that they can get enough relief from the state that they do not need to lift a hand. They seldom, if ever, do an "honest days work." Many have said, "There oughta be a law." Well, there is. When Paul learned that there were men in Thessalonica spending their days in idleness, he wrote, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, If any will not work, neither let him eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). If we let these dead-beats miss a few meals they might learn to work. Paul also charged the Ephesians, "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need" (Eph. 4:28).

Some employees take a job and immediately start working against the best interest of the company that hired them. They are nothing more than troublemakers and rabble-rousers on the job. They stir up dissatisfaction, unrest and strife. Paul wrote concerning the idler and the busybody, "Now them that are such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness (emphasis mine EAF) they work, and eat their own bread" (2 Thess. 3:12). Do you think "there ought to be a law" against the trouble-maker and rabble-rouser? Well, there is.

Have you been shocked and made ashamed for others who make such a grossly immodest display of their bodies? Have you ever thought, "There ought to be a law!"? Well, there is. It is quite clear and deals specifically with this very problem. The Lord impressed this law through the pen of Paul, "In like manner, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefastness and sobriety; not with braided hair, and gold or pearls or costly raiment; but (which becometh women professing godliness) through good works" (1 Tim. 2:9, 10). Unnecessarily ornate and lavish adornment is negated here, but so is the brazen, shameless display of the physical body. Those who follow immodest, unchaste, fashions and fads to the point of making such of a display of their bodies that they become responsible for kindling lust in the hearts of those who look upon them sin in the sight of God.

Have you ever seen a woman in a mixed Bible class wholly dominating the discussion, for all practical purposes com-

pletely controlling the class? Have you ever felt a degree of sympathy for the man who was trying to teach the class and a degree of repugnance for the attitude and lack of judgment of the woman who was doing more teaching than the teacher — or at least trying to? Have you ever thought in such a situation, "There ought to be a law!"? Well, there is. Hear it. "Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness" (1 Tim. 2:11, 12). Let us be careful that we not rationalize this law away.

"What a shame!" Has this been your reaction when you see males with their hair hanging all the way down to their shoulders and below? "There ought to be a law," someone may be heard to say. Well, friends, there is. It shows the divine order of things quite clearly in regard to men's hair. "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a dishonor to him?" (1 Cor. 11:14). Why should so many men today wish to dishonor themselves?

All of us have seen news reports of flagrant disregard for law and order. Civil agents are called "pigs" or "fuzz." Rocks, bottles and insults are flung at men who are responsible for maintaining a decent society. Have you not been tempted to say, rather irrationally in this case, "There ought to be a law," because in this case there are laws — both human and divine against such conduct. Peter urges, "Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evil-doers and for praise to them that do well . . . Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Pet. 2:13, 14, 17). God has not left us in ignorance regarding the attitude we are to manifest toward civil authorities. Paul wrote, "Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God: and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgment . . . for he is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil" (Rom. 13:1, 2, 4). Yes, there is a law relevant to this problem.

Does the prevailing permissiveness concern you? Does it disturb you that so many young men and women just move in with one another with no thought of marriage? "There ought to be a law!" someone may say. Well, friend, there is. Such is a grievous disregard of divine law. Such wickedness will damn the soul to hell. Hear Him. "Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things' sake cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of
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disobedience:" (Col. 3:5, 6). Though homosexuality is even being defended by some so-called religious leaders, it is still condemned in the scriptures, "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9, 10). God's law still reads the same on moral issues. It will read the same at the judgment.

And what about those that rend assunder the body of Christ? What about church-splitters and fomenters of strife? Do I hear someone saying, "There ought to be a law" against that kind of behavior? Well, friends, there is. We are not to hold such in fellowship. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and *turn away from them*" (Rom. 16:17, 18). What will be the eternal destiny of those who destroy the well-being of the Lord's precious body? "If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are ye" (1 Cor. 3:17).

Do you grow weary of hearing men misuse, wrest, twist and pervert the Word of God? Do you feel that "there ought to be a law" against such mishandling of the Word of God? Well, do not charge God with an oversight in this matter. He dealt with it. "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, *handling aright the word of truth*" (2 Tim. 2:15). We must handle aright or hold a straight course in the word of truth. The fate of those who pervert the Word is also impressed upon us by our Lord. Peter, in commenting on the writings of Paul, said, "... wherein are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, *unto their own destruction*" (2 Pet. 3:16). Yes, friends, where a law was needed, God gave one.

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Recycling Our Experiences

With the "population explosion," the world is becoming acutely conscious of the fact that we are fast depleting its resources. The "Arab oil crisis" has certainly emphasized the point upon the consciousness of Americans. Our underground water level has sunk alarmingly. Our forests are ravaged. Our oil reserves are practically non-existent. Our streams are polluted. Even our atmosphere is gradually being filled with alien elements inimical to the life of plants, animals, and man. These facts have made us conscious of how profligate and wasteful we have been, hence has given birth to a multiplicity of efforts to recycle materials which heretofore have been wasted. Aluminum cans, glass bottles, paper, rags, and even garbage are being recycled and used again and again for useful purposes.

It is said that Queen Victoria once visited a paper factory with one of her attendants. The superintendent of the factory did not know who she was, but showed her everything. He took the queen to the room where the first sorting of materials took place. Workers were busy pulling filthy rags from reeking piles of rubbish. The queen was told that their best quality of paper of pure white was made from these foul smelling, unspeakably dirty rags. When the women left, the superintendent learned the identity of his guests, hence later sent Queen Victoria a beautiful package of their finest paper adorned with the royal seal with a note attached saying that the paper was made from the very rags she had seen sorted while in the factory. (From: *Meditations for Religious*, p. 382.)

Many of life's experiences for all of us are *bad*. We are alike the heirs of the consequences of Adam's transgression, hence suffer the ills of a disordered world. By these experiences, many are embittered, disillusioned, and destroyed. We have not learned that it is not what happens to us that destroys us, but how we react to what happens. When we experience failure, loss, disappointment, disillusionment, opposition, and suffering, let us *not pessimistically despair*. Let us rather *recycle our experiences*. Let us use them as instruments of learning and prods of progress. What would otherwise be waste, let us turn them into beautiful and useful instruments of good. Well did the brother of our Lord say: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him." . . . "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:12, 2-4). J.W.A.

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