



The Reflector

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When We Have a Right

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There are basically two kinds of lawful action under any system of law – requirements and rights. Divine law is no different. When something is required, we have no choice but to do it, regardless of the consequences. For example, meeting together for worship is demanded by the Scriptures, along with the items of worship. We have no choice but to do them if we are to please the Lord. Likewise a congregation has no choice but to preach the gospel, care for the needy among the saints, and edify the body of Christ according to its ability. There are many other examples of this principle.

Other things are divinely authorized as rights. They are permitted, but not demanded. Some refer to these things as “authorized liberties.” It is such things that Paul had in mind when he said, “all things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient.” (1 Cor. 10: 23). In this context (1 Cor. 8-10), Paul was instructing the Corinthians concerning the matter of eating meats, particularly meats that had been offered to idols. He assured them in Chapter 8, that it was lawful (permitted) under the law of Christ. He even gave circumstances under which it would be expedient to eat such meats. Likewise, he wrote of circumstances under which it would be inexpedient, even harmful– like times or places when there would be a high probability that the action might cause a brother to stumble. In fact, he teaches that if such caused a brother to stumble, that the one causing it would have to bear some of the responsibility. In other words, the spiritual welfare of brethren is more important than exercising one’s mere rights under the gospel.

In 10:23, Paul adds, “all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.” In another passage on a different subject he says “let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor. 14:26). This makes it important to ask and honestly answer: “Is the exercising of my right

under the gospel resulting in edifying (building up) or the tearing down the Cause of Christ?” In Romans 14 he discusses a similar matter concerning eating of meats and concludes that “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” (Verse 17). All of this suggests that the edification, peace and joy in the kingdom of God is more important than exercising one’s mere rights under the law of Christ. In view of this, why would we insist on what we consider to be just a right to the point of disturbing and maybe even destroying the peace and happiness (joy) among the citizens of the kingdom of our Lord? Is the exercising of our particular right so important to the Cause of Christ that it is worth such an impact on a sizeable portion of our brethren in Christ? We need to answer these questions honestly.

In the ninth chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul uses himself as an example in the matter of exercising one’s rights under the gospel. He defends the right of a preacher of the gospel, to “lead about a wife,” and to “live of the gospel.” Though he did not bind his practice on others, he voluntarily denied himself of these rights for the general good of the cause of Christ. His point seems to be, that if he was willing to forgo his rights and become “all things to all men” that he might save some, then why could not the Corinthians see fit to forgo their rights in the matter of meats offered to idols?

I have no doubt that Paul would have resisted efforts to *force* people to forgo their rights as a matter of doctrine. Later in his first epistle to Timothy, he condemned those who would forbid to marry and to command that people abstain from meats. He listed these among other things characteristics of those who would depart from the faith. (1 Tim. 4:3). It is wrong to *bind* where God has not bound.

However, Paul did encourage folks to *voluntarily*

forgo some rights for the overall good of their brethren and used himself as an example. As much as he cherished his rights under the gospel, he was willing himself and to encourage others to forgo those rights to facilitate the peace and spiritual welfare of the kingdom of God. It is a matter of being charitable toward brethren. We get the idea from reading about Paul's excising his right to "live of the gospel" that he made his judgment on a case by case basis. In some places it was apparently expedient to exercise this right and at other places it was not. At Thessalonica he choose to not receive support from them (2 Thess. 3:9-10). At the same time he was receiving some support from the church at Philippi (Phil. 4:16).

Paul began his discussion of meat eating with, "knowledge puffs up, but charity edifies." (1 Cor. 8: 1). Here He condemns the puffed up or arrogant attitude of a knowledgeable brother who may reason "I know my God-given rights under the gospel and if others do not understand that then it is their problem – I am going to exercise my rights come what may." Knowledge untempered by love can be very destructive to the one who has it and to those with whom he has to do.

Granted, it is not always easy to know when to forgo one's rights, nor when to exercise or even insist on them. I believe that most reasonable brethren would say that we cannot pacify every crank who may oppose some right that we may have. Also, there may be times we may have to weigh the potential benefits of exercising a right over against any potential harm it could cause. But when insisting on exercising a right begins to alienate good brethren and longtime fellow workers in the Lord's vineyard, it seems to me, that it is time to ask ourselves if the cost is worth it.

We need to remember that it is *always* expedient to do what the law demands; it is *never* expedient to do the unlawful; but it is only *sometimes* expedient to insist on a mere lawful right.

We freely admit that to give in to objections to some of our rights would not only be unwise but would cause harm to congregations and the cause of Christ in general. For examples, to give in to those who object to located preachers working with and preaching to a congregation and to those who object to congregations conducting Bible classes would be a mistake – even though we admit that neither practice is absolutely essential for a church to be of Christ. Experience has taught us that the benefits to the edification of the churches from exercising these two rights, by far

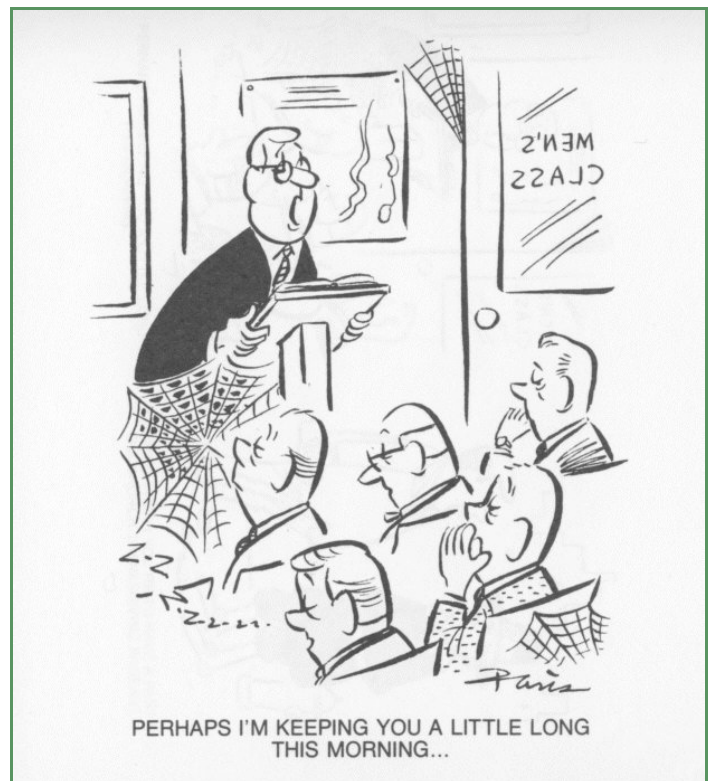
outweighs any benefit that might come from yielding to a few objectors.

However, I would hope that my brethren would not allow some cherished project (which they view as helpful but is admittedly far from being essential) to become the wedge for another split in an already splintered brotherhood – even if (this could be a big "if") it can be successfully argued that they have a scriptural right to the project. It is not like the church would greatly suffer if the project were abandoned.

Sadly, one of the problems is that brethren often have a tendency to over evaluate their beloved practices and institutions making it hard to give them up even if it would be beneficial to the over all good of the Cause. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. was credited with expressing the sentiment that one can criticize the church with little opposition but woe be unto one if he criticizes one of the brethren's institutions – or something to that effect. My experience through many years of preaching has borne out the truth of that observation. We often are more protective of our inventions that we are of the Lord's church.

At any rate, "let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another (Rom. 14:19).

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A Change of Attitude

James P. Needham

A man's attitude is the well out of which his actions are drawn. Attitude is basic and exceedingly important. Every thought, word and deed is colored by your attitude, whether in religion or some other phase of life. Get a man's attitude right and his activities will be in harmony with the laws of God and man. If his attitude be wrong and his actions right, it is usually due to convenience or cowardice; acting in accordance with his attitude would bring discomfort which he doesn't want or he is afraid to act the way it dictates. If one's attitude is right, he can "stand" poverty or plenty, persecution or praise, gladness or sadness without any change in his attitude or ill affect upon his general actions or thinking.

That there has been a drastic change of attitude in the church of our Lord within the past several years no informed person will deny. This change has taken its toll both among preachers and brethren in general. Its cause is due largely to the material prosperity of the brethren in general. We have moved our meeting houses from "goat alley" to Main Street, and out of dilapidated shacks into modern superstructures of ultra modern architecture. We have at least doubled our membership in most communities, and have large contributions and attendances. This is all very wonderful IF OUR ATTITUDE IS RIGHT! An institution as costly and essential to the salvation of the most valuable thing in the world deserves a place of dignity in any locality. If the church improves and advances in the next fifty years like it has in the past fifty, all will be well IF OUR ATTITUDES REMAIN RIGHT! But, with material prosperity of the past several years has come a change of attitude. This change has led to spiritual deterioration among us, thus, to a concerted effort to make of the church a sort of club, or another denomination.

The time has come when many preachers have turned from exposing error, fighting the devil, and hellfire and brimstone preaching, to a social gospel, soft soaping the truth, sugar coating the plain word, and "dehorning" the plain teachings of Christ. The time has come when preachers who call names and identify sin by scriptural designations, and in general preach like Christ and the apostles, are not welcome in many pulpits. There was a time when preachers used the back of their pants legs for shoe shines, rode mules or walked to preaching appointments, got paid for meetings with a side of salt meat or a new pair of socks, and wore the

same suit when they preached and baptized. They were not flattered with favors of men or praised by the public because of their prominence. This is no longer true. Our preachers pay quarters for shoe shines, drive the latest model automobiles to preaching appointments, get paid well, and wear different suits every day; they baptize in a modern baptistery with dimming lights and many are loved, praised and adored by the general public, including sectarians. We do not hesitate to say the most of this is wonderful, IF THE ATTITUDE DOES NOT CHANGE! But, it is astounding and disgusting to see the number of preachers among us who have determined to give both the church and the world what they want—and multitudes of brethren "love to have it so" (Jer. 5:31). When our attitudes become as modern as our buildings, our preaching as soft as our dress, and our praise from the sectarian world as abundant as our paychecks, the church is not drifting—it has drifted! When the plain truth of the blessed gospel meets with its first and foremost opposition within the church, it is past time for alarm, it's time for action!

It is now a common thing to find preachers and brethren in general who condemn debating as a "terrible disgrace to the cause of Christ." They say, "let error alone, it will eventually die out," not knowing that error never dies out, but instead has to be fought out! In their determination to please the world and sign a truce with Satan, they deceive themselves into believing that their attitudes are acceptable to God and in harmony with the Spirit of Christ. They have forgotten, if they ever knew, that the very ground they occupy today was won by debating, devil fighting, name calling preachers of the gospel who gave their lives generally without monetary remuneration, in the struggle to plant the cause of Christ all over this nation, and who died in hope that those who inherited the obligation to continue the "good fight of faith," would not falter and faint under the force of divine duty. God be thanked, there is a remnant of brethren who are not ready to fail those grand old soldiers of the cross, count for naught their sacrifices, fail to appreciate our grand heritage, and turn traitors to the kingdom of God. Some brethren either cannot see, or do not care, that in their efforts to retard the plain progress of the plain preachers and able debaters among us today, they condemn and castigate both the founders and restorers of Christianity.

We have seen the result of this changed attitude both in meeting and local work. One of the quickest ways to be moved on “for the good of the Cause,” or to eliminate the possibility of being called back for another meeting in many communities is to preach like Christ and the apostles. While that is a sad commentary on many churches, it is, nevertheless, a true one. We’ve been told “not to use the words hell, denomination, and sectarian in the pulpit,” to “tell folks they will be condemned instead of telling them they will go to hell.” Brethren have demanded that we not “call names, preach on baptism and instrumental music.” We’ve had our own brethren in the Lord to demonstrate more sympathy for sectarian preachers than for us, in certain battles, and to apologize to Catholics for the plain truths we preached about them. We’ve heard members of the church brother false teachers and compare the body of Christ to “other denominations.”

To preach in many congregations, one must be highly skilled in the damnable art of deviation and dodging, if he has set his heart to stay in the “good graces” of the brethren. Their idea of “conversion” is to rock worldlings to sleep in the cradle of carnality and wake them up in the saving arms of Christ without their ever knowing just what happened. If one tells folks that “every plant my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up” (Matt. 15:13), some brethren will “kindly” tell him to “move on for the good of the Cause” and forever brand him as a “preacher without the Spirit of Christ whose attitude is not right.”

If one will stifle his conscience and burn his sermon outlines on hell, denominationalism, the all sufficiency of the New Testament, and the New Testament church, he can be in “GREAT DEMAND” over night. If he will preach everything in general and nothing in particular, assure the visiting sectarians that they can come back without any fears of having their unscriptural names mentioned publicly or their damnable doctrines condemned scripturally, the brethren, and especially the socialite sisters, will look upon him as “one of our best preachers” and go away singing his praises to the tune of “Isn’t he just wonderful?!” They will write him up in the leading papers as having “conducted the greatest meeting in the history of this congregation,” and before we know what is happening, the preachers meeting schedule will be filled for ten years in advance!

On the other hand, watch the brother whose interest is “getting” souls instead of meetings and see how many times he gets “called back.” He will usually give

dissatisfaction the first trip and soon become known as “one punch Charlie.” If Godly shepherds are determined to feed their flocks on sound doctrine instead of empty husks and invite him back, some of their sheep will rebel, scatter and boycott them, the preacher and the meeting.

What we have said is not to be interpreted to mean that we think all preachers and congregations have changed their attitudes. Let no one conclude that we are herein advocating ugliness or unkindness on the part of preaching brethren. That is as unscriptural as compromise and we’d condemn it just as quickly! We must never fail to let the sinner know that we love his soul and that love motivates us to be plain in our preaching. Many brethren need to study the word “love” and determine its meaning and discover what it demands!

Brethren, unless the 20th Century attitude of compromise is not obliterated from the church of Christ immediately, the number of faithful brethren will continue to decrease by the year until finally those who contend for the ancient order of things will become like a “wee, small voice” crying in a wilderness of softness, sectarianism and professionalism, and the New Testament church will become an unknown organization. The time has come, yea it has past, for truth loving, God fearing brethren to strike, and strike hard! We must unsheathe the sword of the Spirit and put on the whole armor of God and revive the scriptural manner of delivering the greatest message ever heard. Brethren may croak, the sisters faint, and many “church rolls” diminished, but ultimate victory is assured.

This editorial is to serve as a spring board for many articles along this same line. The editors and writers of Bible Bulwarks are not in sympathy with the movement toward professionalism among preachers and general softness among brethren so prevalent today. We believe it must be smitten hip and thigh, and intend to discharge our obligations along this line. We kindly insist that brethren inspect their attitudes and determine whether or not they have changed them from what they should be, and if so, to be willing to get them in tune with the New Testament, in the interest of their own salvation as was well as the salvation of others. The prevalent need of the hour is for brethren to read the works of God more and more, and the works of men less and less, and drink deeply of the spirit and manner of preaching exemplified by Christ and the apostles. — (Original date of article unknown- EOB). Via **Pause-Ponder-Profit**, April 2007.