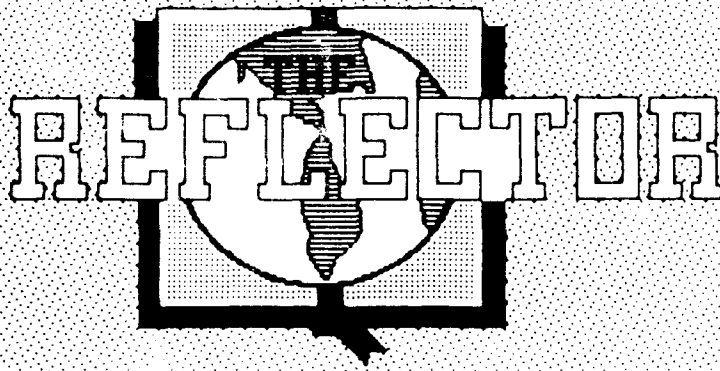


MARCH 1985



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"LIVE PEACEABLY WITH ALL MEN"

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"IF IT IS possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." — Romans 12:18.

As efficient as this computer, with which I am writing these lines, is; I dare say that it could not begin to keep up with the on going feuds involving people who think of themselves as pretty good Christians. It is not likely that any of these will erupt into open gunfire as with the famous Hatfield-McCoy episode. But they are conducted with as much zeal and vengeance using cutting words and spiteful deeds - after all, we think we are too civilized and sophisticated to resort to fighting with squirrel guns. Each side simply uses other means - malicious words and deeds - to cause the opposite number to feel the sting; and if possible to reduce, if not destroy, their good relations with others in order to gain a supposed advantage for its side in the dispute.

These feuds are conducted within neighborhoods, families, and even congregations. Many of them last for years, even generations. Sometimes they have gone on so long that the parties involved could not tell you, if their life depended on it, what started the whole thing in the first place.

Standing for the truth of the gospel against all threats to it, will produce all the contending and enemies that a Christian needs to deal with -- without our feuding

with neighbors, family members or brethren over things that; even if we were proven right in the argument, only effect things that pertain to this life. Why allow such matters to jeopardize our eternal welfare by inciting within us such things as "hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath ... and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal. 5:20,21).

No one can afford to sacrifice spiritual and moral principles for the sake of peace. No one can afford to yield ground when great principles of truth and righteousness are at stake, just to live peaceably with all men. No one should be expected to just "sweep things under the rug" when such principles are at the root of differences. One simply must recognize and accept the fact that if he stands for the truth that he will incite hatred and enmity in many - especially if he is diligent to expose sin for what it is and identifies the guilty as he should. But, we wonder how often differences are kept alive by our unwillingness to sacrifice our pride rather than unwillingness to give up our principles? It is awfully easy for us to deceive ourselves into seeing every dispute as a matter of principle, when in reality we simply have too much pride to be the one who

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"'HOLY WAR' AMONG SOUTHERN BAPTISTS SURFACES"

Lowell Blasingame

THE ABOVE IS a caption of a front page Arkansas Gazette article, 3/1/85, written by John Workman. According to Workman a controversy which has simmered in the Southern Baptist Convention for six years bubbled over in Little Rock last Thursday with the gathering of an estimated 800 pastors and lay members at First Baptist by a group identifying themselves as "Southern Baptist loyalists" and who oppose what they term as the convention's drift to the left.

On the preceding Sunday I chanced to hear Dr. Wright's (pastor of First Baptist Church in Little Rock), radio sermon in which he announced Thursday's meeting and charged that there are now men in high places in SBC and Baptist training institutions who do not believe in the inerrancy of the Scriptures. He decried that miracles such as God's appearance to Moses in the burning bush are regarded by these men as mere allegories or as myths.

There is a degree of empathy that I hold with these men for in our own ranks we have suffered the blight of liberalism from those who while verbally affirming the sufficiency of local churches to do the work given them, have worked hand and foot to promote benevolent and evangelistic organizations to do the work of churches. On the other hand, I marvel that these men who have so long denied the inerrancy of the Scriptures in name, doctrine and practice would be so alarmed at the denial of its miracles by their by their fellow preachers!

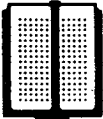
If these men really believe the Bible to be inerrant, why do they not teach their followers to lay aside the Baptist name for which there is not one vestige of authority in the scriptures and to be only Christians (Acts 11:26)? If they believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, why is the doctrine of justification "solely by faith" retained when it teaches that the faith that avails is one that works by love (Gal. 5:6) and that faith alone is dead (Jas. 2:17, 20, 26)? If they accept the Bible as inerrant in its

account of the resurrection of Christ, why not accept its account that those who gladly received the gospel were saved by it and added to the church by the Lord by the same acts (Acts 2:37-41, 47)? If we accept the inerrancy of the Bible in this, how do we account for the Baptist practice of voting on persons to determine their admission into the Baptist church? Is the Bible inerrant only in its account of miracles???

All of which reminds me of the story told years ago of a young preacher who while signing the register in a St. Louis hotel noticed the name, Robert Owen, on the line above. Upon inquiry he learned that it was indeed the noted infidel and was told that at the time he had gone out to eat. The preacher stationed himself in the lobby and upon Owen's return immediately engaged him in discussion, challenging Owen to a public debate. Owen's reply was that debates were for those who differed, not for those who are in agreement. The young preacher vehemently denied that he was in agreement with Owen, whereupon he asked for the young man's Bible and turned to Mark 16:16 read, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth no shall be damned." Looking at the preacher, Owen asked, "Do you believe that baptism come before salvation?" The preacher stammered and stuttered and finally admitted that he didn't. "Then, we are in agreement for I do not believe what the Bible says but neither do you," said Owen.

The point is that while the liberals in SBC may not believe in the inerrancy of the Bible in its account of miracles, neither does Dr. Wright and those "Southern Baptist loyalists" believe in its inerrancy in name, doctrine and practice!

(Editor's Note: We noticed in an AP article in the papers that Billy Graham took his customary soft position: "...I must appeal to as wide a range of people possible. I believe in the holy, inspired word of God, but I have friends on both sides.")



SHODDY WORKMANSHIP

WHO HAS NOT been frustrated by shoddy workmanship? I sometimes think that cars are designed for a major overhaul to coincide with the last payment or the next week after the warranty expires - which ever comes first. The number of payments or the length of the warranty seems not to matter.

"Why don't they build things to last?", is often heard.

Not every shoddy product is caused by workmanship. One may have done his best with the material that he had. But, still we are led to believe that, at times, it is due to careless workmanship.

Careless workmanship can be attributed to factors that have become a part of our society. The pressure to meet quotas -- either self-imposed or forced upon us by the system. If our work is not in the marketplace quickly the competition will have already grabbed the business.

All of this spills over into other areas of our lives - even religion. The competitive, quota-oriented, get-result-as-quickly-as-possible atmosphere has affected the work of the church more than we might think. Pressures to produce impressive facts and get people committed to us before the competition (denominations) get them has, no doubt, decreased the quality of workmanship in God's building. "Building to last" has been put on the back burner in many cases.

Paul warned against this I Corinthians 3:5-15. He pictures gospel workers as builders (v.10) and the church as God's building

(v. 9). He, as "a wise master builder" who had laid the foundation (Jesus Christ) of the church at Corinth. He then warns any other builder to "take heed how he builds". (v. 10). Even though the careful worker could be saved, even if his "work" proved perishable (vs. 12-15), he would still suffer loss. The "work" is not one's bad or sinful deeds, but the fruit of his labor - the material (people) he brings into the building. But, if one has not taken proper heed in building, he must bear some responsibility if the material does not endure.

The workman's aim is not just to build up the church, but to do it with quality material - the kind that will endure. He is not to be just interested in baptizing folks. He is interested in baptizing converted folks. He is not interested in just meeting some quota or number goal, but in taking each piece of material (as many as possible) and making it into a piece in God's house that will stand the test of time and temptation. He is not interested in just motivating action, he is interested in building the **conviction of heart that will supply its own motivation.**

Maybe we need more workers who are interested in preaching the gospel and less interested in keeping up with how many they have baptized (see 1 Cor. 1:16). Such a one may not be very efficient at keeping records, but he is a "wise master builder". Was Paul minimizing the importance of baptism or its necessity? No! He was simply putting things into perspective. -- EOB

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gives in (thinking it to be a sign of weakness on our part), even if giving in would bring peace and do no harm (and maybe enhance) to the gospel of Christ.

Our text recognizes the impossibility of living peaceably with everyone. Some people are simply "implacable"* (2 Tim. 3:3 ASV). Try as you may, these will not be appeased. But, the text says "as much as depends of you live peaceable with all men". It may "depend on you" to turn the other cheek to that neighbor who mistreats you. It may "depend on you" to go the second mile with that family member who demands more of you than is just. It may "depend on you" to "remember that your brother has something against you" and to go and "first be reconciled to your brother" (Matt. 5:23,24).

But even if a brother, a neighbor, or family member proves to be implacable and still insists on being an enemy - then what? Should I then "feed him out of the same spoon that he feeds me"? Why not? After all, you have done all you know to do to make peace with him and he still insists on keeping his part of the feud going without hesitation or apology. But wait, doesn't the Bible have something to say about how Christians are to treat their enemies and those who mistreat them?

"Love your enemies, bless those who who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." (Matt. 5:44) Wonder what would happen if we spent just half as much time on our knees talking to God about our enemies as we do on the phone talking to our friends about them?

"Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; Let the Lord see it, and it displease Him, And He turn away His wrath from him." (Prov. 24:17, 18). "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. 'Therefore if your enemy hungers, feed him, If he thirsts, give him drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good". (Rom. 12:19-21). So, if that brother, family member or neighbor refuses all efforts to make peace and insists on remaining an enemy and doing every thing he can to hurt you - why not try treating him as an enemy? Love him. Pray for him. Do good to him. Attend to his needs. Who knows? You might find that before long you might get to where you can even be civil toward him and not feel too uncomfortable at the sight of him?

Try it, you might like it!

* "without a truce ...one who cannot be persuaded to enter into a covenant" - Vine