

# *It Is Written*

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## **Zeal for Christ in the Spirit of Christ**

By Rick Liggin

"And it came about, when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem; and He sent messengers on ahead of Him. And they went, and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make arrangements for Him. And they did not receive Him, because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them'" (Lk. 9:51-56).

In commenting on this text, G. Campbell Morgan made a profound observation; he said, "It is possible to be zealous for the honor of God in a spirit which puts us out of fellowship with God" (The Gospel According To Luke, p. 132). This statement seems to exactly describe the mistake of James and John on this occasion. Their deep sense of loyalty and respect for Jesus caused them to want to defend Him in the presence of those who did not share their respect.

Their loyalty, by itself, was not a bad thing. In fact, it was a good thing-and quite admirable. But the way in which they wanted to show their loyalty proved that they had not yet imbibed enough of the spirit of Christ. Their response was totally out of character with His life and (saving) mission. Instead of trying to save the enemies of Jesus, James and John wanted to kill them-with fire from heaven! Here was zeal, for sure, but zeal in a wrong spirit.

This same thing happens to us today when we find ourselves despising the enemies of God--hating the sinner, rather than just hating the sin. Oh, we pay lip service to the fact that we only hate the sin, but our attitude, at times, subtly suggests otherwise. We tend to look down our noses at those whose lives are messed up by sin, thinking, "He's just getting what he deserves." Our attitude, even as we try to tell him about his need to repent, is, "You're going to hell and I'm kind of glad of it!"

This wrong spirit also manifests itself in the way some of us (especially in writing) defend truth against error taught by denominational preachers-or even by our own brethren. I find myself, at times, in agreement with the point of truth being defended, but completely opposed to and even embarrassed by the spirit manifested in the one defending the truth. Instead of trying to correct those in opposition to truth with kindness and gentleness, in genuine hope that God will "grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of truth" (2 Tim. 2:24-26), we seem to be more interested in being quarrelsome and stirring up strife.

When such an attitude finds place in our hearts it proves that we still have a carnal spirit-despite our zeal for Christ. It proves that, despite our loyalty to Jesus, we still have not yet imbibed enough of His spirit. Such actions and attitudes are totally out of character with that of our Lord's. And that carnal spirit, though filled with a loyalty to Him, will cause us to be separated from God.

Shall we give up our loyalty to Christ and compromise the truth? Never! Should we continue to zealously defend Jesus? Absolutely! But let's make sure that our zeal is tempered by His godly spirit! Let's not be zealous for God in a way that puts us out of fellowship with Him. No one wins when that happens--except maybe the devil.

## **Erring Toward the Erring**

By Dan S. Shipley

Erring brethren seem to have been a persistent problem in the Lord's church almost from its beginning.

And, if that were not bad enough, the problem has been compounded by the way in which many have erred toward these erring brethren.

In the first place, some have erred toward them by treating their sins too lightly. The plight of erring brethren and our responsibility toward them is clearly set forth in Jas. 5:19, 20: "My brethren, if any among you err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins." Notice how God depicts the condition of the erring. First, they have left the truth. Secondly, they need converting (lit., "turning around"). Thirdly, God sees such a one as a sinner in "the error of his way." Not that he has merely stumbled in doing wrong, but that he practices sin. And, finally, God sees this sinner as a soul in the way of spiritual death. To convert him is to "save a soul from death." This is how God sees the unfaithful and it is the way in which we too must see them. In fact, to view them otherwise is to their hurt as well as our own. To play down the sins of brethren is to play into the hand of Satan. Paul's letter to the church at Corinth clearly shows that such sins cannot be ignored by faithful brethren (1 Cor. 5). For the sinner's sake and for the church's sake, sin must be acknowledged, faced up to and dealt with. Failure to do so now makes it more difficult later, and, worse, invites more of the same.

But, some have gone to the other extreme and have erred toward erring brethren by over-reaction. Accordingly, some have found themselves snubbed, avoided and practically ostracized without being visited, admonished or even encouraged to repent. The cause of truth is no better served in this way than in ignoring their sins altogether. God shows what our attitude should be when He says, "And yet, count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thess. 3:15). Here is what must be done with the erring and how. Admonish him -- and do it "as a brother." Personal hostility has no place in such soul-saving efforts.

One other thing may be appropriate in this connection and it is this. No form of "congregational reprisal" can become a substitute for dealing with the erring brother and his sin. It may be wise not to use these unfaithful brethren in our worship services, but we err in making that the extent of dealing with the problem. The word of God knows of no such limited and partial withdrawing of fellowship.

Finally, any Christian errs who does not see a personal responsibility toward his erring brother. One reason why we do not restore more of the unfaithful is because many among the "faithful" do not relate themselves to such work. God looks to the "spiritual" (all of them) to make the effort of restoring (Gal. 6:1). It is obvious that God is concerned about our attitudes and efforts concerning those who err from the truth. May God and the erring brother know that we are concerned too.

## Testament Relation

By Roy E. Cogdill

The New Testament, like the Old Testament, sets forth not only a system of doctrine and duty, but a historical record of facts, involving and demonstrating the will of God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and of man's duty toward God, his fellowman and toward himself. The history of the New Testament is not independent of the Old Testament history, but is rather a sequel to the old. During the period of Old Testament history, God's plan for human redemption, which had been formulated "before the foundation of the world was laid," was kept hidden in the mind of God as a mystery (1 Pet. 1:18,20; Eph. 3:8-11; Rom. 16:25-26); and it was not revealed for men to know and understand the provisions that God had made for human redemption, or the plan by which it was to be accomplished, until these truths were revealed by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Someone aptly has said that "the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed." The two constitute the whole Divine revelation and complement each other. We understand both only when we take into consideration their unity. It is important, however, to know that God's plan for human redemption existed in God's eternal purpose but remained a mystery in Old Testament days, and is now a revelation in the New Testament (1 Cor. 2:6-13; Eph. 3:1-7).