

It Is Written

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Non-Participation In Sin Is Not Enough

By Edward O. Bragwell

"And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them" (Ephesians 5:11).

Christians and local churches, when questioned about their silence concerning various popular sins, often defend and console themselves by answering, "But, I (or we) do not participate in such things." That is all well and good, but that is not enough. We must also actively expose the "works of darkness" for what they really are. It is not enough to just refrain from such things as false doctrine, homosexuality, social drinking, immodesty, or contributing to unscriptural church innovations – we must "even expose them" for what they are. Now there is where the rub comes. We do that and we get it from every direction – from the participants and non-participants alike.

We hear almost daily people bemoaning the divided state of our nation and even division among Christians. This is often accompanied by calls for those openly exposing such things to cease and desist from speaking out for the sake of unity. They do not seem to get that there is something worse than division, i.e., unity in sin.

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, said, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division" (Luke 12:51). His peace was not unconditional nor unreserved. Paul wrote, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18). He recognized that it would not be possible to be at peace with all men because "all men do not have faith" (II Thessalonians 3:2).

The oneness for which Jesus prayed is based on the truth of his word: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:17-21).

In this prayer, Jesus first prayed that his immediate disciples (the apostles) would be sanctified by the truth of God which is the word of God. He then broadened his prayer to include those who would believe in him through the apostles' word. He prayed for them all to be one as he and the Father were one.

As much as one might desire peace with all men, there cannot be peace without a meeting of the minds. For the faithful Christian, there can be no meeting of the minds with those who are participating in sin nor with those who will not expose sin for what it is.

Preaching And Performance

By Doy Moyer

There is a difference between preaching and performance. This is not to say good preaching does not involve solid delivery or shouldn't use any aids. It is to say there is a difference in focus, and the preacher does well to understand this.

Performance aims at the mechanics. It can come across as staged, a production that takes the audience by storm and keeps them in rapt attention based on delivery. The content is secondary—important perhaps—but not really the main focus. The speaker has attention, and this is the thing. His is an art aiming at perfection of presentation, manner, gesture, and cadence. The cardinal sin is the slip-up, the stutter, or the mechanical failure. The speaker is the show, remembered not so much for what he said but how he said it.

In contrast, sound preaching aims at truth and understanding. Delivery is important because it can draw attention to or away from the text, for the text that shows us our Lord is the thing. Delivery is secondary to the truth and the speaker knows his place in the order of importance. He is not a master, but a servant of the text and a humble minister to those hungering for truth. He is not on display, but rather he places the truth on display and lets it have its intended effect as God's word. His is not a graded performance, but a missional service focused on the one thing.

In other words...

“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

First Century Church Problems

By Kyle Campbell

We sometimes think that we are the only ones who have problems. If we are not so naive as to think that we are not the only ones who have problems, then we are confident that our problems are so much worse than others.

But in this short space, we are going to consider, from concrete examples, some of the problems in the first century church. I believe you will find that they were plagued by the same types of problems that churches have now. Study and meditate upon the following examples: lying (Acts 5:1-11), hypocrisy (Galatians 2:11-14), forsaken duty (Acts 6:1-6), factionalism (1 Corinthians 1:10-17), false teachers (2 Timothy 2:16-18), immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1-13), unfaithful preachers (2 Timothy 4:10) and indifference (Revelation 3:15-17).

So we see that churches had their own problems in the first century. How did they overcome them? By heeding Paul's instructions: “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13). Churches can also overcome sin by heeding the Lord's words: “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent” (Revelation 2:5). Do not think we are unique when we have to deal with sin and wickedness. Churches throughout the ages will continually deal with these problems until the Lord comes again. Watch and pray lest you fall into temptation (Matthew 26:41).