

Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

UNITY

Cecil May Jr.

Dean Emeritus, Biblical Studies, Faulkner University

I have a passion for bringing about unity among the Montgomery churches made up of scripturally baptized believers. Their members are children of God and, therefore, they are our brothers and sisters. We choose our friends, but we do not get to choose our brothers and sisters, whether spiritually or physically. Children of our parents ae(sic) our brothers and sisters.

Black and White congregations have too little association with one another.

Progressive and traditional congregations, as usually identified, sponsor group meetings called “area wide,” but do not include one another.

Non-institutional and mainline, or conservative and liberal, or antis and sound, as sometimes labelled, each look on one another with suspicion.

Contacts among all of the groups named above are rarer than they should be, fault lying generally on both sides. Thankfully, there are encouraging signs. More and more congregations are racially integrated. There is increasing interaction between non-institutional congregations and others.

Jesus is the Son of God (John 8:24), Jesus became flesh (1 John 4:3), biblical baptism is into Christ (Galatians 3:27): these are among the truths that are more important than unity. Not all truths, however, are equally important. Some

things we divide over are trivial: clapping to show approval, praise teams as long as there is one male song leader, people raising hands, saying “Amen;” or “praise the Lord.”

Those who are outwardly expressive of their emotions accuse those who are not of being cold and ritualistic. Those who are more reserved and staid accuse those who are more expressive of just putting on a show. Both are wrong in those judgments.

The last words of Jesus before he was crucified were a prayer for unity. Paul pled for unity at Corinth, asking, “Is Christ divided?” The Ephesian Church was told to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Attitudes needed to maintain unity include humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love (Ephesians 4:2). Agreement on certain doctrines is also necessary: one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. Gentleness and loving forbearance are as important as doctrinal correctness in maintaining the unity of the Lord’s one body.

(May Jr., Cecil, Editor, *PREACHER TALK*, Vol. 37, No. 3, Summer, 2021, p. 3.)

—Faulkner University
53405 Atlanta Highway
Montgomery, AL 36109

RECOMMENDED READING

**335 CRUCIAL QUESTIONS ON
CHRISTIAN UNITY**

BY THOMAS B. WARREN

IN THIS ISSUE.....

UNITY—CECIL MAY, JR.....	1
EDITORIAL—A CRITIQUE OF CECIL MAY’S ARTICLE, UNITY.....	2

Contending FOR THE Faith™

David P. Brown, Editor and Publisher
dpbcftf@gmail.com

COMMUNICATIONS received by *CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH* and/or its Editor are viewed as intended FOR PUBLICATION unless otherwise stated. Whereas we respect confidential information, so described, everything else sent to us we are free to publish without further permission being necessary. Anything sent to us NOT for publication, please indicate this clearly when you write. Please address such letters directly to the Editor David P. Brown, P.O. Box 2357, Spring, Texas 77383 or dpbcftf@gmail.com. Telephone: (281) 350-5516.

FREE—FREE—FREE—FREE—FREE—FREE

To receive *CFTF* free, go to www.cftfpaper.com and sign up. Once done, you will be notified when the current issue is available. It will be in the form of a PDF document that can be printed, and forwarded to friends.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR THE PAPER EDITION

Single Print Subs: One Year, \$25.00; Two Years, \$45.00.

NO REFUNDS FOR CANCELLATIONS OF PRINT SUBSCRIPTIONS.

ADVERTISING POLICY & RATES

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH exists to defend the gospel (Philippians 1:7,17) and refute error (Jude 3). Therefore, we advertise only what is authorized by the Bible (Colossians 3:17). We will not knowingly advertise anything to the contrary and reserve the right to refuse any advertisement.

All setups and layouts of advertisements will be done by *CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH*. A one-time setup and layout fee for each advertisement will be charged if such setup or layout is needful. Setup and layout fees are in addition to the cost of the space purchased for advertisement. No major changes will be made without customer approval.

All advertisements must be in our hands no later than one month preceding the publishing of the issue of the journal in which you desire your advertisement to appear. To avoid being charged for the following month, ads must be canceled by the first of the month. We appreciate your understanding of and cooperation with our advertising policy.

MAIL ALL SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADVERTISEMENTS, AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, P. O. Box 2357, Spring, Texas 77383-2357. COST OF SPACE FOR ADS: Back page, \$300.00; full page, \$300.00; half page, \$175.00; quarter page, \$90.00; less than quarter page, \$18.00 per column-inch. CLASSIFIED ADS: \$2.00 per line per month. SETUP AND LAYOUT FEES: Full page, \$50.00; half page, \$35.00; anything under a half page, \$20.00.

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH is published bimonthly. P. O. Box 2357, Spring, Texas 77383-2357 Telephone: (281) 350-5516.

Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Founder
August 3, 1917–October 10, 2001

Editorial...

A CRITIQUE OF CECIL MAY'S ARTICLE, *UNITY*

This editorial critiques brother Cecil May's article, titled *UNITY*, printed on the front page of this issue of *CFTF*. Please read bro. May's article before reading this piece.

ATTITUDES AND THE TRUTH

We begin this critique near the end of bro. May's article. We know of no faithful church members who oppose the "attitudes" he lists in the first part of his final paragraph as long as they are defined and used as the Bible does. However, Paul, an apostle of Christ, did not see himself as having an attitude that contradicted and violated "humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love" when he opposed erroneous conduct and/or teaching whether done by non-members or members of the church (Acts 13:7-11; Gal. 2:12-14; Also see Eph. 6:20; Phi. 1:7). The apostle tells us that one of the component parts of love (*agape*) is that it "**Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth**" (1 Cor. 13:6). Paul's interactions with people in or out of the church manifested the same.

One may be humble, gentle, patient, and forbearing, but lack the love of the truth (2 The. 2:10). The denominations are full of sincere, humble, gentle, etc., people "**who work iniquity.**" Thus, without the love of the truth, their sincerity, humility, etc., accomplishes nothing regarding their salvation. For without the love of the truth, people cut themselves loose from the divine moorings of New Testament authority (Mat. 28:18; Col. 3:17).

Without the truth of God, it follows that the unity of the Spirit is impossible to achieve. To be of the same mind and the same judgement concerning what our obligations to God are and how to discharge them demands one humanly attainable, infallible, absolute, objective rule of faith and practice (Eph. 4:2, 3; 1 Cor. 1:10). As the apostle admonished the Philippians, "**let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing**" (Phi. 3:16b).

LOVE AND THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

Love (*agape*) is not a sick, syrupy, subjective, sentimentalism that rejoices at our Lord's Words, "**Consider the lilies**" (Mat. 6:28), but then recoils in horror at His sharp rebuke of the Jews in the temple when He said to them they had made His Father's house "**a den of thieves**" (Mat. 21:13; Also see Mat. 23:15-33). The Lord spoke the truth in both cases and one comment was no less loving than the other. This is the case because love (*agape*) always seeks another's highest good. And what greater good is there than working to get people on to the straight and narrow way to heaven and striving to keep them there? The love of God, lost souls, and the brethren often involve reproving and rebuking sinners, exhorting them to repent of their sins, and urging them to remain faithful to Christ (Ecc. 7:5; Luke 17:3; Gal. 2:11; 1 Tim.

5:20; 2 Tim. 4:1, 2; Tit. 1:3; Rev. 3:19; 1 Cor. 15:58; Rev. 2:10). It requires that Christians make alien sinners and erring brethren alike aware of their sins, for sin is the only thing that can separate people from God (Isa. 59:2). Thus, we must get people to understand the heinousness of sin if there is any hope of directing them to the Savior and His gospel plan of salvation (Rom. 1:16; 3:21; 6:23; John 14:6; Mark 16:15, 16; Rev. 2:4, 5, 14-16, 20-23; 3:1-3, 15-19).

No one manifested what it means to **“speak the truth in love”** more or better than Jesus (Eph. 4:15). To be pleasing to the Lord, we too must cultivate the same attitude our Lord had toward people. That attitude caused Him on different occasions and situations to declare the truths necessary for people to see their sins. Jesus also said things that upbraided them for their sins and pricked their hearts because of the same. This Jesus did as He begged them to come to Him for forgiveness, peace, and safety. We too must do our best to emulate out Lord’s attitude toward God, His truth, and the people to whom we speak it. Not only must we do all we can to follow Christ’s example in this but also in all other obligations enjoined on us through His authoritative Word—the final loving truth concerning all things moral and spiritual (John 14:6; John 12:48; Mat. 28:18; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 4:11; 2 Pet. 3:2).

It is recorded of Jesus during His earthly ministry, **“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”** (John 8:30-32). Moreover, our Lord prayed, **“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth”** (John 17:17). We do not know how to be meek, humble, gentle, forbearing, loving, et al., without the truth of God’s Word defining these Godly character traits, instructing us in developing them, and guiding us in how to manifest them in our conduct. Indeed, of ourselves alone we do not know how to be angry and sin not. We must be instructed by the Lord concerning the same (Eph. 4:26).

SUFFERING FOR THE TRUTH

Jesus was perfect in all things (Heb. 4:15), but those who rebelled against the truth falsely accused Him of all manner of vile conduct. During our Lord’s earthly ministry He warned His apostles: **“They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service”** (John 16:2). The same is true of their wicked spiritual descendents to this present hour. Furthermore, many of those who put Jesus to death considered themselves Godly in doing the same. However, on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus, as Peter and the other apostles lovingly preached the gospel to their Jerusalem audience composed of devout men, Peter said to them concerning Jesus—**“ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain”** (Acts 2:23b). Before becoming a Christian, as a persecutor of the church, Paul said of himself, **“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things**

contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). As a faithful apostle he warned Timothy and all faithful church members, **“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”** (2 Tim. 3:12). But opposition to Christ’s gospel and the persecution of His church did not and does not change the fact that **“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12). Thus, the apostle Paul warned the shepherds of the Ephesian church:

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:29, 30).

Some of the most injurious people to the Lord’s church are those who claim to be the church’s friends. They have, do, and will lead people away from our Lord because of their failure to love the truth. Jesus said as much while on earth and the apostles Peter and John warned Christians of the same when they wrote:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction (2 Pet. 2:1). **Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world** (1 John 4:1).

THE LOVE AND AUTHORITY PRINCIPLES

In the light of the foregoing and at this point in this piece, it is appropriate to affirm the following two propositions: (1) *The love principle never rises higher, sets aside, or nullifies the authority of Jesus Christ revealed in His Word.* (2) *The love principle in action always causes one to submit to the authority of Christ* (John 14:15).

Thus, the inspired writer of Ecclesiastes wrote, **“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man”** (Ecc. 12:13). To His apostles Jesus said, **“If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments”** (John 14:15—*ASV*, 1901). Paul wrote that nothing matters **“... but the keeping of the commandments of God”** (1 Cor. 7:19). The apostle John also wrote, **“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous”** (1 John 5:3). People may be soft spoken, mild mannered, reserved, sincere, dress well, always smiling, etc., but fail to keep God’s commandments. Furthermore, some teach that commandment keeping is not important—at least some commandments. But they definitely expect people to do what they say. Indeed, Paul wrote of such wicked characters when he warned brethren, saying.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple

(Rom. 16:17, 18).

John also wrote:

Whosoever transgresseth (“goeth onward,” ASV—1901) and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

Who believes that Paul and John wrote the foregoing truths with the following exception in mind—*If brethren are kind, soft spoken, good speakers, mild-mannered, cheerful, formally educated, family members, etc., God does not require us to give close attention to the doctrine(s) they espouse?*

“CONFIDENCE MEN”

Who believes that false teachers, as the scriptures describe them, will present themselves to us for what they truly are—bloodthirsty, ravening wolves bent on rending the sheep of God’s flock (1 Tim. 4:1-4; Gal. 6:9; 2:4, 5; Rom. 16:17, 18)? Indeed, they take the opposite approach, presenting themselves as meek, lowly, humble, loving, kindhearted, friendly, and the like, because they seek to gain the confidence of the brethren. Then, having sold themselves to the brethren, they know they can sell all they have to them, including their false doctrine. Do brethren actually think false teachers will say explicitly (in just so many words) what their true intentions and plans for the flock are? As Jesus said, **“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits”** (Mat. 7:15, 16a).

Our Lord also said,

But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep (John 10:12).

Sadly, the preceding verse describes certain elders, preachers, educators, editors, and other influential brethren who see the wolf coming, but rather than stand and fight, they run as quickly and as far away as they can from the wolf leaving the flock to be devoured by him. Or, worse than the foregoing, they convert to the wolf’s cause, aiding and abetting him in savaging the flock of God.

Brethren must work tirelessly to keep themselves in the love of God and, thus, faithful to our Lord’s cause (Jude 21). Paul admonished brethren with: **“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is”** (Eph. 6:15-17). Paul also warned that we should not permit **“...Satan (to) get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices”** (2 Cor. 2:11). Thus, the apostle wrote, **“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”** (2 Cor. 13:5). Peter expressed his

inspired sentiments on the matter when he wrote, **“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”** (1 Pet. 5:8). We must also heed the admonition of James, **“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you”** (Jam. 4:7, 8a). The only way we can do this is by keeping our hearts honest and examining all things in the light of the rightly divided Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15; Also see Luke 8:15; Eph. 5:15; 2 Cor. 13:5). Therefore, as important as “right attitudes” are in serving God (and they are), it is not only a matter of our having right attitudes toward God and man, but we must also possess the right attitude toward God’s truth. Then we must exercise every fiber of our being in **“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”** (2 Cor. 10:5; Also see John 15:10; Mat. 5:6; Acts 20:28; Eph. 6:10-18; Phi. 3:13-17). If there is a greater challenge set before any of us than this one, what is it?

“I HAVE A PASSION”

The words comprising the heading of this section of this critique are the first words found in the body of bro. May’s article. In *Merriam-Webster’s* online dictionary, *passion* is defined to be “a strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something.”¹ Thus, bro. May is enthusiastic and excited about “unity among the Montgomery churches made up of scripturally baptized believers.” He tells us that as members of the church they “are our brothers and sisters.” Then he tells us “We choose our friends, but we do not get to choose our brothers and sisters, whether spiritually or physically. Children of our parents ae(sic) our brothers and sisters.” I do not know of a faithful child of God (as that expression is defined and used in the New Testament) who is not **“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”** (Eph. 4:3). As we have studied love’s relationship to the authority of Jesus, brethren must be careful lest their enthusiasm and excitement for unity cause them to turn a blind eye to, or in some way, ignore the fundamental and significant place that New Testament authority has in obtaining and maintaining Christians unity (Col. 3:17; 2 John 9-11; Jude 3; John 14:23; 15:10; 1 John 2:5).

Because people are “scripturally baptized believers” does not necessarily mean they are going to be faithful to the Lord for the rest of their lives. Paul made the foregoing clear to the Galatians when he wrote to them saying, **“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel”** (Gal. 1:6). To them he also wrote: **“I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain”** (Gal. 4:11). Warning Timothy of placing confidence in men too hastily, Paul wrote, **“Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure”** (1 Tim. 5:22). The apostle John also warned Christians, **“Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a**

full reward” (2 John 1:8).

The “**unity of the Spirit**” discussed in Ephesians chapter four is synonymous with the “**doctrine of Christ**” found in 2 John 9. And, both of these expressions are synonymous with the “**apostles doctrine**” of Acts 2:42 and “**the faith**” of Jude 3. It must not be forgotten by all who are enthusiastic and excited about the unity of the church today, that those “baptized believers” of the first century were unified only so long as they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine. Accordingly, John wrote to Christians, saying:

I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. ... And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it (2 John 4, 6).

One cannot have more passion for unity than did those faithful first century brethren. Today, we must not permit our passion for unity permit us to transgress the doctrine of Christ in seeking to attain it. If we do, we do not have God in what we do. Such “unity” is wholly unknown to the New Testament. *Some seem to have forgotten, if they ever knew it, that all unity is not right and all division is not wrong.*

COMPARING APPLES AND ONIONS

Following his first paragraph, bro. May gives us three brief paragraphs in which he mentions “Black and White,” “Progressive and traditional,” and “Non-institutional and mainline, or conservative and liberal, or antis and sound” churches. When bro. May identifies churches as “progressive,” traditional,” “non-institutional,” “main line,” “conservative,” “liberal,” “antis,” and “sound,” it would help to clarify matters if he would tell us distinctly what he means about these churches by defining each label he attached to each church.

Bro. May also pointed out that “contact among all of the afore labeled groups are rarer than they should be, fault lying generally on both sides.” Besides not defining the labels he placed on different churches, he “muddies the water” even more when he writes of the divisions existing between the churches, but fails to give even one example of this alleged “fault lying generally on both sides.” We would like to know what he means by “fault finding on both sides” and who was/is guilty of the same on any side. Furthermore, since according to bro. May’s view these churches are not in “contact” with each other as “they should be,” will he tell us how much “contact” there “should be” between and among them and what kind of “contact” it “should be.”

ASCERTAINING BIBLE AUTHORITY

In reading his article, I wondered where bro. May has been over the years in his study of the importance of Bible authority, of how the Bible authorizes, how that authority is ascertained by the humans to whom it was given and pertains, and how it relates to Christian unity (John 8:31, 32; 12:48; 1 Cor. 4:6—*ASV*, 1901; Eph. 3:4; 2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Tim. 2:15; Col. 3:17). Thus, it seems good at this point to deal with some

matters regarding the same.

OBLIGATIONS AND OPTIONS

It is the case that where there is no New Testament authority for man to act, there is no Godly obligation for him to discharge. Thus, it is the case that only where there is a New Testament obligation are there options to be considered for discharging said obligations. In determining what option will be used to discharge an obligation to God, one is to seek the option that offers the greater advantage in accomplishing the same—getting the job done in the quickest and best way possible with the brethren, circumstances, and means available at the time. Moreover, God expects His children to have enough sense, love for the truth, Bible knowledge, respect for New Testament authority, and how to ascertain it to know the difference in our obligations to God and the options available to discharge said obligations.

*People sin when they teach doctrines that make optional matters obligatory and obligatory matters optional. **Whether they are “binders” or “loosers,” God has always taken a rather dim view of men who seek to legislate for Him. We must not bind where God has not bound nor loose where God has not loosed.***

A NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE

When Paul and Barnabas were planning their second preaching tour, Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them, but Paul did not. Luke tells us:

And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God (Acts 15: 39, 40).

Clearly Paul and Barnabas were not of the same mind and judgment concerning whether or not to take Mark with them. Indeed, “**the contention was so sharp between them...they departed asunder.**” However, there is no indication that any of the brethren involved in the matter had a sinful attitude toward one another or conducted themselves in a sinful manner. Also, was there, to use bro. May’s words, “fault lying generally on both sides”? Did Paul and Barnabas violate the Lord’s will about unity and division? Did these brethren, two of the greatest servants of God revealed in the Bible, by their attitude and/or conduct stand in opposition to our Lord’s prayer for unity (John 17:20:21)? Did Paul himself violate what he taught regarding unity in 1 Corinthians 1:10? The answer to each of the previous four questions is a resounding NO! Why is that the case? Because Paul and Barnabas differed over an optional matter—whether or not to take Mark with them on the second preaching tour. In said matter, the obligation was to preach the gospel. Whether or not Mark went with them was an optional matter. Indeed, two preaching tours rather than one developed out of their differences regarding Mark (Acts 15:39, 40). Furthermore, both preaching tours were “**recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God**” (Acts 15:41). Differences over options will always exist in

the church. It is sad that in every case where brethren disagree over optional matters they cannot be dealt with as Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Mark, and the church in Antioch of Syria did. Nevertheless, it is a divine example to follow in solving such cases. If not, why not?

It should be remembered that with the passing of the years Paul changed his view of Mark. Could it be that Paul's opinion of Mark changed because Mark's later conduct evidenced that he was far more dependable than he was during Paul's first preaching tour (Acts 15:58; 1 The. 5:21)? Indeed, Paul wrote to Timothy about Mark, saying, "**Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry**" (2 Tim. 4:11). At one time Mark was not "**profitable**" to Paul, but at a later date he was "**profitable**" to the apostle.

BROTHER MAY'S LIST

In bro. May's list of the divisions existing in the churches in Montgomery, he completely ignores divisions among brethren caused by some who made optional matters obligatory and divisions among brethren caused by some making obligations optional.

Whether a church is predominately black, or white, or whatever the color, race, and/or ethnicity of the people comprising a congregation, brethren are to love one another (Rom. 12:10; 1 The. 4:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 4:7, 8, 11, 20). If brethren hate one another because of any of the foregoing, or for any other reason, and they do not repent of the same before they die, hell will be their eternal abode (Gal. 5:20). Therefore, if brethren choose to be members of certain congregations, or leave them, because they hate brethren for whatever reason, they sin in so doing (1 John 3:4). *To love one another is not an optional matter. When brethren love one another they strive to get each other to obey the Lord's commandments so the unity of the Spirit can remain.* One dare not teach a doctrine that attempts to loose brethren from that divine obligation. As John wrote, "**We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death**" (1 John 3:14; Also see 2:3-5).

The foregoing being said, when Christians have situations develop over optional matters as did Paul and Barnabas, all other things being scripturally equal, they have New Testament authority to cease working together—at least for a time. If that is not the case, are we to think that every time a preacher leaves a congregation to preach for another congregation it must be because the congregation he is leaving is guilty of sin for which it will not repent? Has a preacher, working with one congregation, left it to work with another faithful congregation for what he considered to be opportunities better suited to him, to his family, or financially (1 Tim. 5:8), etc.? Is it the case that elders of a church may scripturally discharge a preacher only when the preacher is guilty of unrepented of sin? If nothing else, surely these questions make it clear that if we are going to properly discuss biblical unity, we must know the reason for division between brethren. Thus, the case of

Paul, Barnabas, and Mark ought at least teach us that we must recognize the difference between obligatory and optional matters and how differences involving one or the other ought to be dealt with.

In the light of the foregoing, why did bro. May treat the differences between the "Black and White," "Progressive and traditional," and "Non-institutional and mainline, or conservative and liberal, or antis and sound" churches as if all of their differences were over optional matters and involved no differences over what is obligatory?

Regarding "Antism": In this context, I define "anti" to be a binding on others what God in His Word did not bind on them. They make obligatory what God makes optional. Thus, they are like the Judaizing teachers of the First Century church who bound circumcision, et al., on Gentiles in order for them to be saved.

Does bro. May not know at this very late date that the division between "non-institutional" ("anti") congregations and those congregations that remained true to New Testament doctrine came into being well over 65 years ago? Does he not know that when certain brethren taught that it was a sin (a violation of New Testament obligations) for a church to help non-saints out of the church treasury, or to establish and run orphan homes, or to eat a common meal in the church building, or support a preacher through a "sponsoring congregation" that said brethren were making laws for God? These "anti" brethren bound where God did not bind—making obligatory on the church what is optional. Moreover they made it abundantly clear that they would not fellowship churches who did not believe and practice what they did. Thus, they created an unauthorized division in the Lord's church.

Before the foregoing kind of "anti" faction came into being, there had earlier been other brethren who bound where God had loosed—"anti" Bible classes, "anti" "located preacher," "anti" women teachers, "anti" multiple containers for the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper, and others. These errors also continue to exist today.

Multitudes of articles, sermons, and debates have thoroughly discussed these differences for "umpteen" years. Nevertheless, "antis" continue to bind where God has not bound—making optional matters obligatory. If these "anti" brethren truly want Christian fellowship to exist as it is taught in the New Testament, let them repent of teaching false doctrines that make optional matters obligatory.

Regarding Liberals or Progressives: Brother May also referred to "Progressive and traditional" churches, lamenting that they are not associating with one another as he thinks they should. Again, for clarity sake, it would help if bro. May would define his terms when he uses them. *I define the words "liberals" and "progressives" in the following manner. They are brethren who by their doctrines loose people from what God in His Word has bound on them. In other words, they make obligatory matters optional.*

As to the meaning of the “traditional,” “mainline,” “progressive,” “liberal,” and like terms, according to the New Testament a church is either faithful to the Lord or it is not. As to what bro. May means by some of his labels I am not sure. Which of the seven churches of Asia could be described as “traditional” or “mainline” and which ones may accurately be described as “progressive,” or “liberal?” Using bro. May’s labels, how would the Corinthian church, or the churches of Galatia, or Philippi, be categorized? Unless words are defined they are used to no profit. Furthermore, if anyone is permitted to define words to suit himself, any doctrine could be made to appear correct.

The following are only a very few examples of false doctrines that when believed and practiced make obligatory matters optional. They are: the use of mechanical instruments of music (or other kinds of music) other than singing only in the worship of God; observing the Lord’s Supper on any day of the week; marrying and divorcing contrary to the teaching of Matthew 19:6, 9; alien sinners are not amenable to the law of Christ; God approves of women exercising dominion over men in leading prayers, singing, preaching, etc.; elders of a church do not have final authority in determining optional matters in discharging the church’s obligations; elders need to be re-evaluated and reaffirmed by the congregation periodically; the New Testament is not an infallible pattern for Christianity; faithful children of God are in the denominations; where there is grace there is no law; one’s baptism is acceptable to God even though one was not baptized for (unto) the remission of sins; and many others. Until these brethren cease and desist from teaching doctrines that loose brethren from what God has bound on them, then it is impossible for faithful children of God to fellowship them.

“SHALL WE SPLINTER?”

The late brother James D. Bales (a former college professor of mine) taught that people outside the church were not amenable to the Covenant of Christ. He applied it to our Lord’s teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage (MDR). Thus, he taught that only when one became a Christian did one become amenable to the doctrine of Christ. Then, and then only, did Christ’s teaching on MDR become binding or an obligation to one. Thus, Bales taught that before baptism a man and a woman could marry and divorce numerous times contrary to the teaching of Matthew 19:6, 9. Only Christians are amenable to Matthew 19:6, 9.

When faithful brethren such as the late Thomas B. Warren exposed and refuted what became known as “the Bales doctrine” bro. Bales wrote a book titled, *Shall We Splinter?*. Brother Bales wanted the liberty to teach said error without any division occurring between those brethren who believed as he did and those who did not. As learned as bro. Bales was, and as much good as he did over many years, he did not see that his doctrine was violating a fundamental teaching—namely, that all people are under the authority of Christ and thus obligated to live as Christ teaches. Therefore, men

become sinners today by transgressing our Lord’s perfect law of liberty (Jam. 1:25; 1 John 3:4; Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Thus, people cannot be scripturally baptized and remain in adulterous unions, even if civil law says they are “married.”

Any doctrine that implies a false doctrine is itself false. Bro. Bales’ doctrine permits men and women to remain in adulterous unions, while thinking that their adulterous unions are acceptable to God because of their baptism. He was advocating “unity in diversity” in obligatory matters. He did not teach the truth about who is amenable to the New Testament of Christ. If the church embraced his view, many things could be taught and practiced without fellowship being broken. But the New Testament is full of teaching about scriptural unity and division, upholding the truth and exposing error, corrective church discipline, withdrawing fellowship from unrepentant brethren, marking false teachers, and proper Christian conduct.

If the New Testament in its totality does not set the limits of Christian fellowship, who will determine the bounds of Christian fellowship? It would ultimately and logically fall to men and their opinions to determine who is and who is not in fellowship with God—what is spiritually binding on mankind and what is not. This is exactly what happened in the first great apostasy—men formed councils to determine what was binding on Christians and what was not. It has always been the way men have conducted themselves when they turn away from New Testament truth as the final authority in all things religious (Col. 3:17).

GOD’S PLATFORM FOR UNITY

In closing his article, bro. May repeats the need for scriptural attitudes among brethren in obtaining and keeping the unity of the Spirit. He emphasizes that right attitudes “are as important as doctrinal correctness.” Faithful brethren are not for “doctrinal correctness” to the exclusion of right attitudes or vice versa. The New Testament places them on an equality in the life of a faithful child of God. Indeed, having a right attitude is a necessary part of one being doctrinally correct.

In paragraph 6, bro. May gives us more of his views regarding New Testament truth. He writes:

Jesus is the Son of God (John 8:24), Jesus became flesh (1 John 4:3), biblical baptism is into Christ (Galatians 3:27): these are among the truths that are more important than unity. Not all truths, however, are equally important. Some things we divide over are trivial: clapping to show approval, praise teams as long as there is one male song leader, people raising hands, saying “Amen;” or “praise the Lord.”

Notice that he says the Deity of Christ, the humanity of Christ, and water baptism for the remission of sins are “among the truths that are more important than unity.” In the same context, without lifting, as it were, his pen he listed what he called “trivial” matters—“clapping to show approval, praise teams as long as there is one male song leader, people raising hands, saying “Amen;” or “praise the Lord.” *Merram and Webster* define “trivial” to be “of little worth or importance”²

How is any truth of God's New Testament "trivial"—"of little worth or importance." *The truth of the New Testament either authorizes "clapping to show approval, praise teams as long as there is one male song leader, people raising hands, saying 'Amen;' or 'praise the Lord' " or it does not.* Does bro. May not realize that it is not up to him to arbitrarily dictate to the church what is and is not "trivial" truths? Who ever heard of "trivial" truths?

For well over 100 years the Christian Church has said it is a "trivial" matter to divide the church over the use of mechanical instruments of music in the worship. They did not and do not have New Testament authority to say as much and neither does bro. May have said authority to say that some truths are "trivial" and some are not. From the list we can tell that bro. May equates "clapping to show approval" with brethren saying "Amen" or "Praise the Lord." Some years ago a liberal brother wrote a book titled, *Just Another Way of Saying Amen*. In it he taught that applauding is no different than saying "amen" to express approval of a spiritual act such as one being baptized. May obviously agrees with it. However, all can read in the Bible that "amen" is an acceptable manner of expressing approval (1 Cor. 14:16). Also, ascriptions of praise to God from His faithful servants are recorded in the sacred writings. We use the same regularly in singing spiritual songs in the worship. However, we find nothing said about applause as a way to show approval of spiritual matters. There is as much New Testament authority for applause, stamping of feet, whistling, yelling, and the like in the New Testament for expressing our approval of spiritual things as there is for using mechanical instruments of music in the worship of God. Of course, there is none. Nadab and Abihu found out the hard way that where they obtained the fire to burn incense was no "trivial" matter to God (Lev. 10:1ff; Rom. 15:4).

Bro. May also said, "Agreement on certain doctrines is also necessary: one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one

baptism, one God." I suppose when he uses the word *necessary* he means that it is obligatory. That is certainly what I mean by "necessary." So, bro. May believes there is an "agreement" among brethren that is obligatory. He then gives examples of what is "necessary" (obligatory) for brethren to agree, listing six of the seven planks in God's platform for unity (Eph. 4:1-6). Again, one must know the totality of what the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular says regarding these "certain doctrines" to be able to know what each one means and what they cover, including the plank he left out. But, we do not know what bro. May means by them.

CONCLUSION

Paul admonished, "**And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him**" (Col. 3:17). This is the beginning of doing all things "**decently and in order**" (1 Cor. 14:40). Hence, true Christian unity begins with what Paul taught. Regardless of his good intentions, fundamentally bro. May only gave us his personal opinions (what is "trivial" and what is not) in said article about what would help bring about Christian unity in Montgomery, AL or, for that matter, any where.

Sadly, I doubt anyone from Faulkner University disagrees with what bro. May wrote in said article—certainly not enough to say anything critical of it. There was a time when that would not have been the case. More could be written regarding May's article, but I will stop for the time being.

—David P. Brown, Editor

END NOTES

¹<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/passion>, accessed 9/3/2021.

²<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trivial>, accessed 9/30/2021.