

Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

MARK AND AVOID

David P. Brown

There can be no doubt that Christians are commanded to “mark and avoid” certain members of the church when it is called for. However, in general, the churches have chosen to ignore this command and they will pay a price for their sin of omission, not only at the final judgment, but in this life as well. We reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7).

Do you remember the mechanic in T.V. advertisement of some years ago who holds the oil filter in his hand and says, “pay me now or pay me later?” You can pay “\$3.00 for a filter now or \$1,200 for a new motor later.” Ignoring God’s law of “marking and avoiding” is a sin of omission. It is not pleasant for Christians to “mark and avoid” at the moment, so we tend to ignore the divine instruction. There is the immediate reality of sinning against God by refusing to remedy a serious problem as God directed. Having omitted what God commanded, this permits the evil leavening of a sinful member(s) to influence through one’s life and/or doctrine to further infect the church, making for a greater problem later. But the Bible commands us to “mark” such evil people and later in the article we will see that we are to mark faithful brethren also. With the previous comments in mind, please study with me the following passages.

“MARK” THE EVIL ONES

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).

The word *mark* translates from the Greek word *skopeo*. It means “to look at, behold, watch, contemplate.” It is used metaphorically of “looking to.” In Romans 16:17, it is used as a warning against those who cause divisions, and in Philippians 3:17 as observing those who walk faithfully in order that Christians might have an example after which to pattern their conduct. In Luke 11:35, *skopeo* is rendered into the English “take heed.”

The word *avoid* is translated from the Greek word, *ekklineo*. It means, “to turn away from, to turn aside, turning away from those who cause offences and occasions of stumbling according to the doctrine, turning away from division makers and errorists.” We are to stay away from them and out of their way so that we will not fall in with them in their evil work. We are to have nothing to do with them, except that we rebuke them and refute any errors they may teach (Acts 15:1, 2; Gal. 2:5, 11; 2 Tim. 4:2; Jude 3). If the divine admonition does not mean we are to mark them for the error they teach and completely avoid them, what words would inspiration employ to say as much? The reason is obvious. When the contentious, factious, and/or false teacher is left to himself by faithful brethren he will soon have nobody with which to “fuss” but himself and his sinful influence is cut off from the congregation.

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**Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Founder
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Editorial . . .

ARE YOU IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD?

Whosoever transgresseth, 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 (2 John 9-10).

Spiritual fellowship between men is only possible with those people who are in fellowship with God. People are brought into fellowship with God when they are obedient to the Gospel. What does it mean to be obedient to the Gospel? It means: 1) People must hear and understand the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-4); 2) Believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God; 3) Repent of one's sins; 4) Confess that one believes that Jesus is the Son of God; 5) Be immersed in water by the authority of Jesus Christ into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in order to obtain the remission or forgiveness of one's sins (John 14:6; 14:15; Jam. 2:17-24; Col. 3:17; 1 The. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17; Rom. 10:14; Mark 16:15; Rom. 1:16; John 8:24; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:10, 17; Mark 16:16; Mat. 28:19; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 22:16; Rom. 6:3, 4; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:26, 27; 1 Pet. 3:21; Heb. 5:8, 9; Rom. 6:17:18; Acts 2:41, 42, 47; Mat. 16:18; Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:18; Eph. 5:23-27; Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:3). Please study very closely the preceding verses.

The aforementioned is God's great plan of salvation from sin for mankind (1 John 3:4; Jam. 4:17; Rom. 3:23; 6:23). More than this God does not require of anyone in order to be saved from past sins and, thus, be brought into fellowship with Him. Less than this and one cannot be forgiven of one's sins and, therefore, remains lost and out of fellowship with God, and God's faithful children, which children are only in His family, the church (1 Tim. 3:15). God's plan of salvation is that simple, regardless of what others erroneously teach. Thus, the truth of God pertaining to man's salvation must be believed and adhered to before fellowship can be obtained with God. Those who have been saved from their sins by their obedience to the Gospel of Christ, and thereby brought into fellowship with God, are authorized by the New Testament to fellowship only those people who are themselves in fellowship with God through their own obedience to the Gospel, and who remain in fellowship with Him by living as the New Testament teaches Christians to live—that is what it means to be faithful in Christ's church.

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In 2 John 9-10, the apostle makes it clear that in order to remain in fellowship with God, and all of those who are in fellowship with Him, one must continue to be obedient to the doctrine of Christ concerning those things the New Testament obligates one to do in order to be faithful to Christ in His church. There is no other way that is acceptable to God. Take it or leave it. Be saved or be lost. It is strictly up to you and no one else. Thus, with the Holy Spirit inspired James, we beg and plead with everyone, by the mercies of Jesus Christ, to **“receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls”** (Jam. 1:21; also see Jam. 1:25; 1 Pet. 1:22; Luke 8:11, 15; John 12:48). Furthermore, we exhort all who are Christians to, **“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”** (Rev. 2:10; Also see 1 Cor. 15:58; Mat. 25:21).

If you do not have enough interest to take the time to study the scriptures, you don't have enough interest or time to go to heaven (2 Tim. 2:15). No one will acci-

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The church had not existed very long before false teachers reared their ugly heads in it. **“And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved”** (Acts 15:1). Paul called them **“false brethren.”** **“And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage”** (Gal. 2:4). In fact, the books of Galatians and 2 Corinthians were written in part to counteract their cancerous doctrine. They were working for their own sensual ends, they served their own belly. In their own misguided zeal, they would travel to Rome or anywhere else they could to spread their error among the churches. This they would do through their smooth and fair speech, their goal being to beguile the hearts of the innocent. Therefore, Paul ordered the church to oppose them boldly and without hesitation, using strong and sharp words in opposition to their nefarious error so that the church would know the false teachers for what they were and recognize that the doctrine they taught was evil.

The first passages we considered in this study primarily concerned “false teachers.” But, one can “walk disorderly” without teaching a false doctrine. That being the case, what should be done with those who otherwise “walk disorderly”? Paul wrote, **“For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies”** (2 The. 3:11).

dentally stumble into heaven. It is a prepared place for a prepared people (John 14:3). And, our life in the flesh on earth is the only place and time to prepare for eternity (2 Pet. 3:9; Heb. 9:27; 2 Cor. 5:10).

All of us are but one heart beat away from eternity. Think about the uncertainty and brevity of life in the flesh on earth, be honest with yourself (Luke 8:11, 15), and respond to the gospel call accordingly.

For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2).

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Mat. 11:28-30). —

Verse 14 gives the answer: **“And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.”** **“Disorderly”** translates from the Greek word *ataktos*. It is a military term meaning, “not keeping rank, insubordinate.” Such church members (soldiers in the army of the Lord) are “out of step” with the doctrine of Christ, the **“captain of their salvation”** (Heb. 2:10). They must be brought to repentance or avoided by faithful brethren if they refuse to repent. Those brethren who refuse to **“have no company with him”** also commit sin in so doing. Thus, by their unauthorized actions they too are out of step with the will of heaven (Col. 3:17) and need corrective church discipline.

Regardless of whether a church member is a false teacher, or a church member who walks disorderly in some other way, or one who has chosen to sever fellowship from faithful brethren, the action should be the same. We must “note” them, “mark and avoid” them. “Marking” starts with the public declaration of their sin. “Avoiding” is how we react toward them in the days that follow. Both of these take great faith in and love of God so we will have the courage to act in such matters (1 Cor 5:9-11).

“MARK” THE GOOD ONES

In Philippians 3:17, Paul writes, **“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk**

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so as ye have us for an ensample.” In this passage **“mark”** means to fix the attention on and is used to teach the brethren to imitate Paul in his conduct. In Romans 16:17, the word *mark* is used so faithful brethren will be able to identify the trouble maker and avoid him. But in the Philippians 3 Paul says, **“brethren, be followers together of me.”** In 1 Corinthians 11:1, he adds, **“as I also am of Christ.”** Christians are to pick out men and women in the church who are worthy of imitation and make “note” of them. We are to **“mark”** those good examples for our encouragement. It is regrettable, but some brethren focus on the “failures” of some brethren rather than the faithful conduct of Godly brethren. It is as if they choose to focus on Judas Iscariot rather than on the apostle Paul in their own service to Jesus. Let us remember the advice of the Psalmist. **“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace”** (Psa. 37:37).

What keeps us from obeying the Lord’s commands to **“mark”** good men among the saints to be our examples among men to follow? The answer is found in that all too often our values are misplaced. What keeps us from obeying the Lord’s command to “mark and avoid” wicked brethren? Sometime, relatives are involved, brotherhood projects—where the money comes from to fund such endeavors, fear of losing jobs—this is especially true of preachers. On occasions, close friends are involved or it is a combination of all the foregoing. But, when all our excuses are given, God’s instructions remain the same. We need the attitude of Peter and the rest of the apostles who said, **“We ought to obey God rather than men,”** (Acts 5:29). Can anyone begin to imagine what and who all

Noah and his family had to avoid to be and remain faithful to God (Gen. 6:9; Heb. 11:7; Rom. 15:4)?

If any church ever had a reputation properly deserved for teaching the importance of obeying God’s commandments, it has been and is the church of Christ, as that term is defined and used in the New Testament. But it is one thing for the church to teach the importance of obeying God’s Will and quite another for her to do it, and that consistently, steadfastly, and without respect of persons. To the church’s shame, in general, she has failed consistently and with regularity to obey God’s commandments pertaining to the withdrawal of fellowship from erring brethren who are determined to continue in sin, refusing to repent of the same. Moreover, we have watched once faithful brethren (as far as we knew) “mark and avoid” faithful church members while they zealously exhorted the church to remain in fellowship with those brethren who espouse false doctrines—brethren who continue to refuse to repent of their sins. And, this is after the false teacher was approached on many occasions to obtain his repentance, but to no avail.

In one church, where I preached many years ago, my mind was made up to leave that work when one of the two elders frankly stated to his fellow elder and me that as long as he was an elder in that congregation it would never withdraw fellowship from any a member of it. It is with that sad fact in mind that we close this article with the prayer and hope that brethren who teach the truth on this timely topic will come to practice what they preach—for faith without works is dead, being alone (Jam. 2:17).

—Spring, TX