

# Fulton County Gospel News

*Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World*

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

Established 1953

January 2008

Vol. 42 / No. 1

## “REASONABLE DISSENTION AND DISPUTATION”

by Lee Moses

*Strife* is a mark of worldliness, a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:20). While strife remains in the world it brings nations to war and tears apart families. Still worse is when strife enters the Lord's body, tearing apart churches, discouraging the faithful, and providing an object of ridicule for the heathen. While strife is generally to be avoided, there are certain types of strife in which Christians must engage.

Acts 15 presents an occasion in which dissention and disputation was warranted:

*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. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question (verses 1-2, emphasis LM).*

The term “therefore” indicates a conclusion that follows what precedes—as it has been put, “When you see a ‘therefore,’ see what it’s ‘there for.’” When the men from Judea were teaching the brethren falsely, it naturally followed that Paul and Barnabas would have a sizeable dissention and disputation with them. Likewise, for the faithful child of God

today, there comes a time when it naturally follows that he will dissent and dispute.

### When the Peril of Sin is Allowed

Satan pretty well has his way with the world. He is called “*the god of this world*” because of the preeminent place he holds in its heart (2 Corinthians 4:4). From Eve's first taste of the apple up to the present moment, sin has reigned. John contrasted the church with the world: “*We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one*” (1 John 5:19, New King James Version). Unfortunately, although “*the world passeth away, and the lust thereof*” (2:17), the world is content to continue in the destructive ways of sin. Even more unfortunate is that many brethren are apparently content to allow it, perhaps even to join it.

By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul castigated the Corinthian church for sitting idly by while fornication was being committed:

*It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you (1 Corinthians 5:2).*

The Corinthians should have spoken up when this sin was taking place. Because they failed to speak up, Paul was compelled to take them to task. When sin is being condoned, Christians are compelled to speak up.

Today, homosexuality is called an “alternate lifestyle,” as though it were a viable choice (compare with Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Young heterosexual couples likewise live together in fornication, with no apparent thought that it might be wrong (compare with 1 Corinthians 6:13-7:2). The current “sexy” fashion trend encourages young women to dress in such a way as to entice men into lust, and thereby into sin and death (Matthew 5:27-29; James 1:14-15; compare with Matthew 18:6). False doctrines on marriage, divorce, and remarriage encourage unscripturally joined couples to remain together in adultery (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Loose fellowship practices spread the leaven of sin throughout the church (1 Corinthians 5:6-13).

When such is taking place, it naturally follows that the faithful Christian will speak up, and dissent and dispute if a defense is attempted. Satan might be getting his way, but Christians charge boldly into the fray (Ephesian 6:10-18). It may require firm rebuke. It may require, as it did for the Corinthians, the touchy process of “*put[ting] away from among yourselves that wicked person*” (1 Corinthians 5:3-5, 13). Some will not like it. But if one's soul is threatened, it is not an enemy but a **friend** who will try to talk the imperiled one out of his predicament.

**FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS**

USPS Publication #211780

... is a Periodical publication issued monthly by the Church of Christ at Third and Bethel (P.O. Box 251), Mammoth Spring, AR 72554-0251. **POSTMASTER: Please mail all changes of address to the above address.**

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**FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS**

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**When the Pattern of God is Altered**

God has given a pattern for those living in the Christian age what they need to do to be saved: Hear the Gospel of Christ (Acts 11:14; Romans 10:17), Believe (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6), Repent of sin (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30), Confess Christ (Romans 10:10; 1 John 4:15), and be immersed in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). To remain saved then requires faithful Christian living (Matthew 10:22; 1 Corinthians 15:58). When some were trying to bind circumcision upon Christians to the extent of saying, “*Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved*” (Acts 15:1); they were guilty of altering God’s pattern for salvation. Should we not dissent and dispute when teachers today assert that one can be saved by faith only? (against James 2:24). Or when they replace God’s plan of salvation with a “sinner’s prayer”? (against 1 Peter 3:12). Or when they require a priest’s mediation

to pronounce someone saved? (against 1 Timothy 2:5). Salvation can only be found in Christ’s pattern, “*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).

God’s pattern is not limited to His plan of salvation—indeed, adherence to His pattern in **all things** is essential to maintaining salvation (Hebrews 2:1-3; 2 John 9). God has a pattern for the organization of the church—elders overseeing the flock and its work, with deacons serving various needs of the church under the elders’ oversight (Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13). The church is instructed, “*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account*” (Hebrews 13:17). When some want to make the evangelist the pastor/overseer, or to subject a serving eldership to popular vote of the congregation, it naturally follows that faithful Christians will dissent and dispute. Such is also true when the Lord’s pattern for the worship and name of the church is altered.

The church is to stand at the ready to defend the purity of God’s pattern: “*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*” (Jude 3). Elders, the overseers within a local church, must be able to refute error, and to refute it **forcefully**. An elder may be appointed only, if among other qualifications, he is one “*Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers*” (Titus 1:9). All members should likewise stand at the ready to give a defense of the Gospel pattern (Philippians 1:7, 17; 1 Peter 3:15).

**When the Precision of God’s Word is Attacked**

Beginning particularly in the nineteenth century, certain forces sought to alter God’s authoritative pattern by devious means—by eliminating the possibility of there even **being** an authoritative pattern. Some of them began to question the authorship of various books of the Bible, and to assign them such late dates as to render their future prophecies a farce. Others have tried to find clashing doctrines between the different writers of the New Testament. There is little doubt that their motivation has largely been to undermine the accuracy of the Bible. One particularly noted destructive critic, Julius Wellhausen, admitted “almost before I heard his reasons” he was ready to accept a hypothesis that placed the writings of Moses as a late addition to the prophets. Others question whether an ancient book can be applied to a modern world.

Is God’s word precise? Is it authored by God, accurate in its statements, and applicable to modern man? It certainly claims to be (2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:3). And it will certainly stand up to testing (Matthew 24:35; John 10:35; 1 Peter 1:23-25). The Bible contains historical statements that could have been made only by those contemporary with the events they described. Those of later generations questioned the historical accuracy of references to “Hittites” (Exodus 3:8; Numbers 13:29; et al.) and a Roman proconsul governing in Cyprus (Acts 13:7, American Standard Version). Further archaeological discovery and historical research has shown several such statements accurate. One could look to Biblical prophecies clearly fulfilled centuries after they were made (Isaiah 44:28; Daniel 2:36-45). One could look to the perfect unity of the Bible, despite the fact that approximately forty different men wrote its sixty-six books.

The precise word of God has profoundly affected countless lives through the centuries, and will no doubt continue to do so.

*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Hebrews 4:12).

With the attacks the word of God is facing, and with the clear evidence on its side, should not those who have been begotten by it be standing at the ready to defend it?

### Conclusion

As with Paul and Barnabas, there come times for the faithful child of God when it naturally follows that he will dissent and dispute. The current culture may be one of “live and let live” and “just agree to disagree,” but the voice of reason—the voice of Truth—must be heard. Whether it be confronting these issues in public debate, speaking with others one on one, or whatever format it might take, the Lord expects Christians to engage in reasonable dissention and disputation.

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## WHEN HEROES FALL

by Chris Perry

We have likely all had it happen—someone to whom we looked as an example of Christian living, knowledge, and influence commits some transgression against God and falls headlong from the pedestal upon which we had placed them. An elder admits to being involved with drugs or alcohol; a preacher commits adultery; a preacher’s wife murders her husband; a seemingly faithful member reveals a long-hidden sin in a tearful

confession—any number of events happens in the lives of any of a variety of Christian men and women, and the foundation of our faith is shaken. Questions surface like, “How could *they* do such a thing?” “Why didn’t I see it sooner?” “If *they* can’t be faithful, how can I?” However, in the midst of these questions is an opportunity for learning. Let us therefore examine some lessons we can learn when our spiritual heroes fall.

### Sin is Universal

The Bible presents clear proof from cover to cover of the universality of sin. Adam and Eve, two people who lived in a paradise free of hardship, death, and suffering, chose to go directly against the only negative command God had given (Genesis 2-3). Moses, who would lead God’s people out of Egyptian bondage and be the example of godly leadership in many respects, killed a man in cold blood (Exodus 2:12). Saul, the first king of Israel and a godly man when first ordained king, sank into the depths of wickedness over a span of forty years (cf. 1 Samuel 13, 15, etc.). And even David, described by inspiration as “*a man after His [God’s] own heart*” (1 Samuel 13:14), committed at least four major sins during his reign, going so far as to commit adultery and have the woman’s husband killed (2 Samuel 11; cf. 6:1-11; 24:1). Despite being one of Jesus’ three closest friends, the apostle Peter would deny Jesus three consecutive times (Matthew 26:69-75).

We must recognize that the potential to sin is universal, and no one is exempt. John makes just such an acknowledgement: “*If we say that we have no sin [the potential to sin—CP], we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (1 John 1:7). All “*have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23), and all face the possibility of sinning again.

And this includes *any level of sin*. The examples of Moses, David, and a myriad of others living and dead reveal that *anyone*, if the circumstances fall a certain way, can be tempted to do *almost anything*. Picture a good Christian woman, abused for years by her husband, and presented an opportunity for emotionally fulfilling companionship with another man. Or picture a faithful Christian father, poverty-stricken and overcome with the pressures to provide for his family, given an opportunity to steal money or provisions. It *has been the case, is the case* and likely *will continue to be the case* that good people can do bad things.

This knowledge ought to provoke two reactions from the faithful Christian: *disgust for sin* and *sympathy for the one overtaken*. Who can look at the destruction caused by sin in the lives of once-faithful people and not despise sin and its origin, Satan? Who dares to glorify and exalt worldly things when the effect of such things is so tragic? Godly people should echo the sentiments of the Psalmist: “*Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way*” (Psalm 119:128). But, dear Christian, shame on the ones who see a brother or sister overtaken in sin and laugh, mock or dismiss with no pang of sympathy, who treat the one overtaken as fodder for chain e-mail, water cooler talk, and sinful gossip! Might there not be a time when we find ourselves in such a situation, and would we not then need someone to “*have compassion, making a difference*”? (Jude 22).

### Sin is Sinful

The preceding heading might at first glance seem redundant, but consider it more closely. *Position* or *situation* sometimes gets in the way of recognizing and properly diagnosing sin. Saul’s sinful actions as king seemed to stem from an under-appre-



ciation of God’s authority, which was likely a byproduct of his perception of his authority as king. As well, David was likely intoxicated with his own power as king when he “*sent messengers, and took her*” (2 Samuel 11:4). Certainly, it took stepping out of the situation for David to properly understand the sinfulness of his actions (2 Samuel 12:1-6). pattern

It is the tendency of some today to flow to one of two extremes when sin infiltrates the life of a spiritual hero: they either *excuse the sin* or they *intensify it*. Often, the excuse mill is powered up when someone of prominence is found to be in sin, and the sin is lessened, hidden, or ignored altogether. Or, because the sin overtakes a preacher, or an elder, or some other person of position, others pounce on the individual with no mercy, resisting with greater force because of the person’s prominence. It is, of course, the case that position brings responsibility; James warns, “*...be not many masters [teachers–CP], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation*” (James 2:1). However, regardless of position or circumstance, sin is still sin, and its eternal consequences are still the same if not forgiven. Repentance is still required, and the fruits of repentance must be as readily accepted from one person as from another. As John sees a figure of the Day of Judgment, he describes “*the dead, small and great, [who] stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works*” (Revelation 20:12). As Paul makes clear, “*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...*” (II Corinthians 5:10).

Inevitably, someone we look up to will falter. It is not by mistake that Paul adds to his entreaty for followers the qualifying statement “*...as I also am of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

May we see in the imperfection of our spiritual heroes the valuable lessons that sin is universal and sinful in every instance. And may we ever remember Paul’s admonition: “*Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

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### GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

### THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God’s commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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