

# 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

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## HOW TO DESTROY YOUR ENEMIES

by Terry Hightower

The War Between the States ends and the opportunistic scalawags are busy lording it over their fellow Southerners. A hot-blooded contingency of die-hard Rebels gains an audience with President Lincoln. His gentle, friendly manner soon thaws the ice, and the Southerners leave with a new respect for their old enemy. A Northern congressman approaches the President and criticizes him for “befriending the enemy,” suggesting that instead of befriending them he should have had them shot for the traitors they are. Lincoln smiled and replied, “Am I not destroying my enemies by making them my friends?”

Christ Jesus proclaims:

*This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you (John 15:12-14).*

Although many of us sometimes live as if we are sent into the world to compete with one another, to dispute with each other, or even unnecessarily to quarrel with one another. Jesus sends us out to love each other. It is even easy for a Gospel preacher to tell others from the pulpit or classroom podium to love one another, when his life is a demonstration that this is the last thing he does.

When someone makes a great demand of us, we almost instinctively

ask: What right do you have to make this demand? If you ask the Lord: What right do you think you have to demand that we love one another? His heart-piercing, marvelous answer is: “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*” (John 15:13). Jesus gave men a commandment that He Himself first fulfilled. John repeats his description of this love of Christ that, like the peace of God, “*passeth all understanding*” (Philippians 4:7; compare with Ephesians 3:19) in declaring: “*Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*” (1 John 3:16). Biblical, Jesus demonstrated love involves not doing what persons in the world do when they feel insulted.

*Whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him two (Matthew 5:39-41).*

Paul shows by the Spirit, in Romans 12:20, that such God-like response can serve an evangelistic purpose when he instructs: “*But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head*” (thus “blowing his mind” and causing him to be ashamed of himself to the point of possible

interest in why we operate this way and not as the world).

While still a young boy, a certain Christian formed the habit of praying beside his bed before he went to sleep. Later, when he joined the army he kept up this practice though he became the object of mockery and ridicule in the barracks. One night, as he knelt to silently pray after a long, weary march, one of his tormentors took off muddy boots and threw them at him one at a time, hitting him on each side of his head. The Christian said nothing, took the persecutor’s boots, put them beside the bed, and continued to pray. The next morning, when the other soldier woke up, he found his polished and shined boots sitting beside his bed. It so affected him that he asked for forgiveness and after a time became a Christian. Many of us wonder why our relatives and friends do not obey the Gospel. Could it just be, my brethren, that we have tried everything except Jesus’ own method?

*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: for peradventure for the good man some one would even dare to die. But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:7-8),*

thus “destroying his enemies by making them his friends!”

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**FAITHFULNESS IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE**

by Lee Moses

Of all the discouragements a Christian must face, perhaps none surpasses the apostasy of once faithful brethren. The Christian is discouraged when he sees how error has gradually infiltrated and overcome congregations with whom he could once assemble and worship in spirit and in truth. The Christian is discouraged when colleges and schools of preaching that once served as spiritual lighthouses within their geographic regions now disseminate liberalism and Biblical agnosticism. The Christian is discouraged when children of God in whom he once placed the utmost confidence have lost all trace of conviction in the Gospel to which they once clung tightly. Such disappointing departures can cause a Christian to wonder, "If all these brethren cannot remain faithful, how can I? Is a life of faith-

fulness impossible?" Undoubtedly, such discouragement has caused some to throw in the towel, as they finally conclude, "Yes, a lifetime of faithfulness is more than I can give." Or perhaps they redefine *faithfulness*, reasoning, "What the Bible teaches as faithfulness is more than God can reasonably expect." Then they happily clear their newly lowered bar of "faithfulness," which actually places them in the realm of faithlessness. They begin fellowshiping doctrinal error, ignoring immorality, and generally not living very differently from the rest of the world; all the while convincing themselves that they are sufficiently faithful.

However, faithfulness—that is, true faithfulness—is not impossible, even in this age of and apostasy, liberalism, and doubt. One can continue to follow the "old paths" (Jeremiah 6:16) that faithful Christians followed in times past. Let us consider a few reasons we can know that faithfulness is not impossible.

**Because God has told us what we must do.** "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). One can lament that we live in an age of apostasy, but not that we live in an age without access to the word of God. Bibles are more readily available and affordable than at any other time in history. And by reading and heeding, one can still be a "perfect...man of God...thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The Lord's "divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3), and that applies to life and godliness in every year, generation, century, and millennium as long as the world

stands. Even if others lose sight of following God, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

**Because God warns us what we need to avoid.** The world is a spiritual minefield, capable of destroying souls attempting to pass through to the other side. But in His word, God has shown us where all the "mines" are. He warns us to avoid false teachers and teachings (Matthew 7:15; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 9-11), hatred (Galatians 5:20; 1 John 4:20), unbelief (Hebrews 3:12; 4:11), enthrallment with human philosophy (1 Corinthians 3:18-20; Colossians 2:8), dimming of the spiritual perception (Ephesians 4:18-19; 1 Timothy 4:2; Hebrews 3:13), fornication (1 Corinthians 6:18; Hebrews 13:4) and other sinful lusts (Matthew 5:27-29; 2 Timothy 2:22; 2 Peter 2:11), fearfulness (Matthew 25:25; Revelation 21:8), responding in anger (Ephesians 4:26, 31), foul language (4:29; Colossians 3:8), and other sins and stumblingblocks that endanger the soul. Perhaps it may seem a bit much to avoid it all, but we can indeed "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). This brings us to another assurance that faithfulness is not impossible...

**Because God does not demand the impossible.** "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). God does not expect people to do anything they cannot do. God expects Christians to be faithful in the midst Jesus exhorted the church at Smyrna, and consequently all Christians, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation

2:10). Jesus' primary point was not that one needs to be faithful until he dies, but rather that one must be faithful even if it costs him his life. However, if this teaches explicitly that one must be faithful regardless of the cost, it teaches implicitly that one must be faithful regardless of the duration; a teaching affirmed in numerous other passages (Romans 2:6-7; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:9; Hebrews 3:14; 10:35-39). And God demands faithfulness regardless of how many others may depart from faithfulness: "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Corinthians 11:19; compare with 1 John 2:19). God expects us to "preach the word" when people no longer want to hear it, and when the few faithful Christians are being **killed** for their faithfulness (2 Timothy 4:1-8). But since God demands a life of faithfulness, and God does not demand the impossible, one can live a life of faithfulness from the time he puts on his Lord in baptism until the time his spirit departs the body for the beyond.

**Because God has recorded historical examples of faithfulness.**

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). The word for "patience" in this verse means "the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty" and can be translated "patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness," or "perseverance."<sup>1</sup> So when Paul speaks of the "patience of the Scriptures," he speaks of "the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty" that the Scriptures provide. One of the most powerful ways the Scripture provides the capacity to hold out or bear up is through its historical examples of faithfulness: "Take, my

*brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy"* (James 5:10-11, emphasis LM). As Jesus gave the exhortation to the church at Smyrna to "be faithful unto death," He shortly followed the command with an example: "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth" (Revelation 2:13). Many of the greatest heroes of Biblical history are those who remained faithful to God despite widespread apostasy, such as Noah, Elijah, and countless other prophets. Their lives serve as a testimony that faithfulness is not impossible.

**Because the blood of Christ can cleanse any willing soul.**

Sometimes one can be discouraged by the overwhelming power of temptation and sin. One's past love for the Lord may have waned, and he may view himself as being past restoration to that first love. But as the hymn proclaims, "There is power in the precious blood of the Lamb." "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). Just as that power in the blood is available for the alien sinner willing to believe the Gospel of Christ, repent of sin, confess Christ, and be baptized for the remission of his sins (Romans

6:3-4; Acts 22:16; compare with Revelation 1:5), the power in Christ's blood is available for the child of God who gives in to temptation or goes astray: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:7, 9). One who is "far off" from the Lord, and thus "without hope," can be "made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:12-13). The blood of Christ brings **redemption**, purchasing our ransom from the slavery of sin (Ephesians 1:7; compare with Romans 6:16-18). That blood brings **justification**, rendering a "not guilty" verdict from the judge (Romans 5:9). That blood brings "**boldness** to enter into the holiest [‘holy place,’ American Standard Version]" (Hebrews 10:19, emphasis LM). That blood purges one's conscience from dead works that he may again serve the living God (9:14). God does not allow acquiescence to sin; but He makes provisions for His children who do—He demands faithfulness, and the blood of Christ will do the rest. No matter how numerous or egregious may be the sins in one's life, he can be forgiven.

**Because God is right.**

Regardless of how many may deviate from God's way, God's way is still the right way. As the psalmist praised, "Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments. Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful. My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words. Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it" (Psalm 119:137-140). Yes, the psalmist was very discouraged by those who had



“forgotten” God’s words. But he never lost his certainty that God was right, and continued to follow Him. We must not concern ourselves with obtaining or being part of the largest following (John 12:42-43; Galatians 2:10; 1 Peter 3:20; 1 John 5:19). *“Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding”* (Proverbs 9:6). *“As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him”* (Psalm 18:30). God’s commandments are mandatory. His warnings are invaluable. His promises are certain. One who sides with God may not be on the side of the human majority, but he can know he is right. God is always right!

**CONCLUSION**

Perhaps the thoughts of this article are very obvious and rudimentary. However, when one considers

the numerous brethren who have lost heart at least partly because of the apostasy of others, it is apparent that some are missing the obvious and forgetting the rudimentary. Yes, a lifetime of faithfulness is rare—it is the exception, not the rule (Matthew 7:13-14). However, it **can** be done and **must** be done—let us avail ourselves of the provisions and promises God makes, that we may finish our course with joy and faithfulness: *“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day”* (2 Timothy 1:12).

1 Hupmonē, in Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 1039.

**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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