

When You Plainly Oppose Error

H.E. Phillips

For some time a large body of religious teachers and leaders have been busy trying to find a basis for "unity" in what they call "diversity" of opinions on Bible teaching. Many of them are interested only in opening their arms to embrace all who believe that Jesus is Lord and Christ." The doctrine of doing something to be saved, or obeying the law of Christ, is obnoxious to them. They want to be "Freeee" from all law in Christ. But that is not possible if one wants to be saved. All who will go to heaven must obey God (Matt. 7:21-22). All who "obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:8,9). That "law of Christ" is the gospel which began in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and began to guide them into all truth (Gal. 6:2; John 16:13; Acts 1:1-2,8; 2:4,31-33).

Who will go to hell? Who will be lost in eternity? The answer clearly is: All who live and die in sin. Sins and iniquities separate men from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). "Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:21,24). All those who disobey and reject the will of God are sinners.

Sin is defined as the "transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Where no law is, there is no transgression (Rom. 4:15). If we are not under law, of any kind, we are not sinners, because the apostle Paul said where there is no law, there is no sin. That is what the word of God says. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Both Jew and Gentile, all men, are guilty of disobeying the law of the Lord, and are therefore sinners. Unless these sinners hear and obey the gospel, which is the power of God to save, they will be lost.

I am sick of hearing brethren whine because one speaks forthrightly against error from the pulpit, in the classrooms, in religious journals and publications and in private studies from house to house. Over the years I have had my part of canceled meetings, canceled subscriptions to *Searching The Scriptures*, when I edited the paper; and verbal assaults by phone, letter and in person. My offense was to speak out about error someone was teaching.

The critics always charge that one who opposes error is attacking the person who is teaching the error rather than the error. Who was guilty when Christ opposed error in the strongest terms? Anyone who has read the 23rd chapter of Matthew cannot deny that Christ used plain and forceful speech in denouncing the scribes and Pharisees for their sins against God and the people. They taught and practiced things contrary to the word of God (Matt. 15:7-9). Jesus called them hypocrites, and said they would compass land and sea to make one proselyte, and when he is made, they make him twofold more the child of hell than they were (Matt. 23:15).

Stephen, one of the seven chosen in Jerusalem to attend to the needs of the Grecian widows, was opposed by some of the most prominent religious leaders of his day. The plain truth he preached to them, recorded in Acts 7, caused his death by this mob of religious fanatics. Even in the face of death, Stephen said to them: "Ye stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always

resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it" (Acts 7:51-53). Such language is not calculated to "win friends and influence people," but that is not why we preach the gospel of Christ.

Some will say, It was different then because Stephen was inspired and knew the hearts of these people. Stephen was inspired to speak the truth, but not to judge their hearts. He knew their false teaching and their opposition to the doctrine of Christ which began on the Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ. He knew also that the truth of this doctrine would make men free (John 8:32). Their error had to be opposed without compromise, otherwise the doctrine of Christ would not convict these people of their sins that they might repent and be saved. Stephen loved the truth and the souls of the lost more than he feared the wrath and rejection of these evil religious men. For that reason he denounced error that truth may prevail.

Would some of these complaining brethren condemn courageous preachers of the gospel today for doing exactly what Christ and Stephen did in opposing error? We could cite verses that tell of Peter, James, John, Paul and the other apostles doing the same thing. The reason: that is what the gospel requires of all who preach the gospel of Christ. Do we not teach that disciples of Christ should do as he did? Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample" (Phil. 3:17). That has been preached from the beginning.

If faithful brethren love the truth enough to oppose error anywhere and at all times, regardless of who teaches it, why should they not be regarded as faithful to the Lord, just as Stephen and Paul are?

The truth of the matter is that one cannot preach Christ and his word without condemning error, even error among brethren. Just remember that "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Let error and evil remain with those of truth and good, and before long the power of truth and good is destroyed by the error and evil. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21).