

BRETHREN IN ERROR

By Lee Moses

Excuses, excuses—some make excuses for themselves, some make excuses for others, and some make excuses for what they do with others. As it has of late become increasingly in vogue to disregard God's boundaries of fellowship, all sorts of excuses have been made to justify arbitrarily extended boundaries. One arbitrarily extending preacher, anticipating the response he knew would come to his removal of God's ancient landmarks, said, "And if somebody says, 'Well, he's a brother in error,' you tell him, 'Do we have any other kind?'" But are brethren in error the only kind of brethren there are? Statements have implications, and we need to consider the implications of such a statement. If you say brethren in error are the only kind . . .

YOU SAY REPENTANCE IS UNIMPORTANT:

During His earthly ministry, Christ preached, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). As He entrusted the Great Commission to His apostles (and subsequently to the church), He said, "Thus it is written . . . that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47). Christ viewed repentance as demanded by the nearness of the kingdom, and as pivotal to the Gospel which was to be proclaimed among all nations.

However, if brethren in error are the only kind, then what does one repent from and into? There would be no appreciable difference before or after "conversion," because there really would be no conversion at all. Yet the Scriptures say, "*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Does this sound like there is no appreciable difference before or after conversion? "*...again that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*" (Ephesians 4:22-24, emphases LM).

CONVERSION IS NOT FICTITIOUS, AND REPENTANCE IS PREREQUISITE TO ANY CONVERSION

And as Christians go through life, not only do they confess their sins, but they also repent of them. As Peter rebuked the former sorcerer Simon, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22). Regarding the church of Christ at Corinth, Paul rejoiced, for godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter (2 Corinthians 7:10-11).

Of course the Christian is thoroughly dependent upon the grace of God for forgiveness, but before that forgiveness can be received, there must be an appreciable change of mind which will lead to an approved course of action. Error must be rejected and left behind.

YOU SAY ERROR IS INCONSEQUENTIAL

The reason that error must be rejected and left behind is because error is serious. The Hebrew word for "sin" (chatta ah') carries with it the concept of "missing the mark." So "error" (when regarding Biblical truth) and "sin" are basically synonymous. Anyone who has ever read the Bible knows that God does not take sin lightly—He loathes it (Genesis 6:5-7; 1 Kings 14:22; Psalm 5:4-5). It matters not if the religious world may not see error as serious; as Jesus said, *"That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God"* (Luke 16:15).

But what message is sent when one says, "Brethren in error are the only kind"? The message is clearly sent, "Do not worry about error." Accepting error could hardly be called "the love of the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:10). The psalmist exclaimed, *"Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way"* (Psalm 119:104). Because he appreciated the value of God's truth, he hated every false way—love of the truth demands hating every false way

There is only one true church, one true Lord, one true faith, and one true baptism (Ephesians 4:4-5). All others are false; they are erroneous; they are lies. For one to say error is inconsequential makes him a liar. Those who do not receive the love of the truth, and instead choose to believe a lie, cannot be saved; but will perish (2 Thess. 2:10-12). Excluded from the heavenly city will be *"dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie"* (Revelation 22:15, emphasis LM). To say error has consequences would be a grave understatement.

YOU SAY GOD IS UNJUST

In Romans 2, Paul makes a marvelous argument for the justice of God. Many of the Jews scorned the Gentiles as condemned reprobates, all the while believing that they themselves would be able to skate through God's judgment based on their birthright (verses 1-3). Paul repudiated such thinking. He said that "there is no respect of persons with God" (verse 11) and that "we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things" (verse 2). How could God judge impartially and according to truth? Because He "will render to every man according to his deeds", (verse 6, emphasis LM). If God justified some and condemned others with no consideration for their conduct, He would not be just. If God were to disregard error, He would not be just. Furthermore, how could God make the demands that He does if one can never be more than a "brother or sister in error"? He says, *"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you"* (2 Corinthians 6:17). But if one can only be a brother or sister in error, no one can really "come out from among them," no one can really "be separate," no one can really stop "touching the unclean thing." Such demands would not be just if we could not meet them.

YOU SAY GOD'S FAVOR IS UNATTAINABLE

If it is impossible to be any kind of Christian than one in error, no one can ever be in favor with God. Fellowship with God would be impossible, as one cannot be in Christ and in error at the same time. The apostle John uses the picture of light to signify truth and darkness to signify error:

"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 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" (1 John 1:5-7).

If one remains "in darkness," he can have no fellowship or favor with God. Uzzah was a "brother in error." He was only one of many involved in transporting the Ark of the Covenant by means of a cart, instead of having the descendants of Kohath bear it on their shoulders with the staves (2 Samuel 6:3; compare with Numbers 4:15). Then Uzzah would put forth his hand to steady the Ark, when even the Kohathites were forbidden from touching the ark itself (Numbers 4:15, 19-20). Just an oversight, right? How favorably did God view Uzzah's continued error? *"And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God" (2 Samuel 6:6-7, emphasis LM).*

While we are certainly privileged to stand on glory's side of the cross, nothing has changed regarding God's disposition toward error. If one cannot remove himself from error, he cannot find the favor of God. Peter wrote, *"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Peter 3:17).* However, one can remain steadfast and not be led away with the error of the wicked. And one who is led away with error can return back to the favor of God: James wrote, *"Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:20, emphases LM).*

There is obviously no flawless human being on earth. However, Christians are presented "without fault before the throne of God" (Revelation 14:5). Is it only at the Judgment that the Lord can deem a Christian a "good and faithful servant"? Do we have peace with God while on earth, or do we remain at enmity? Are we absolved from our sins each first day of the week, only to begin to stockpile them throughout the rest of the week? No, Christians have true peace with God. They have removed themselves from error, and their errors have been removed from them, so that they can stand completely justified before God—free from all error (Romans 5:1-2).

Everybody has his faults. However, where it pertains to Biblical truth, the Christian determines to keep himself from error. If a "brother" has always been in error, he has never been in Christ. Let us realize the grave consequences of the statement, "Brethren in error are the only kind."