

THE DIVINE NATURE AND FELLOWSHIP¹

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INTRODUCTION

The material found in 2 Peter 1:1–11 is significant in helping the Christian understand his relationship both to God and to his fellow man. Verse 4 expresses the consummation of all of God's efforts for and among men—that men might become partakers of His nature. Here is man at his zenith: not living on the animal level or merely on the civilized human level, but on the Divine level. Such an incomparable consideration is fraught with unparalleled implications.

EXPOSITION OF THE TEXT

What does it mean to "become partakers of the divine nature"?² *Koinonos*, translated "partakers," occurs fourteen times in the New Testament, including its compound forms. This word indicates common sharing and participation between two or more beings in whatever element the context identifies, including both persons and things. It refers to partnership in business (Luke 15:10) and in the Lord's work (2 Cor. 8:23). It refers to participation in evil (Mat. 23:30), in sufferings for Christ's sake (Heb. 10:33), and in the glory that awaits the faithful (1 Pet. 5:1). It is rendered "communion" in reference to demon worship (1 Cor. 10:18, 20). Thus our text says that we can participate and share in God's nature in some way.

Divine, built on *theos*, is an adjective meaning "that which pertains to God." It appears without the article in the Greek text and would literally read, "partakers of divine nature" rather than "the divine nature."

Nature is a word described by the lexicons as essence, native condition, natural characteristics. On this text, Thayer comments: "The holiness distinctive of the divine nature is especially referred to."³ It is obvious that man does not and cannot partake in the transcendent "omni-traits" of Deity. It is in God's moral attributes that men have the privilege (and obligation) of sharing: "Ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16).

Is this sharing in God's nature present or future? The apostle states that through God's precious and exceeding great promises we "may become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). This language admittedly sounds futuristic in tense. However, ...*ye may become*... is an aorist imperative, rather than a future tense form of *ginomai*, meaning "to become or be made anything." The aorist is the simple past tense of the Greek and when used in the imperative mood, refers to action involved without reference to its duration or repetition. The future sound of the verb results from the basic meaning of the verb itself, rather than from its tense. Paul wrote the following parallel thought: "seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man that is being renewed unto knowledge **after the image of him that created him**" (Col. 3:9–10, emp. DM).

It appears certain, therefore, that Peter is talking about a relationship into which these brethren had already come: "having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust," the remainder of the verse reads. Escaping a lust-corrupted world to partake of God's nature is but a description of repenting of sin, obeying the Gospel, and living as a child of God. This partaking of God's nature is one in which His people must continue to progress, as succeeding verses show (vv. 5–11). While we enjoy this fellowship in the holy nature of Deity in this life, there is obviously a sense in which we will partake of His nature more fully in the eternal realm: "Beloved, now are we children,

and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is" (1 John 3:2).

This partaking is the fulfillment of "precious and exceeding great promises." The New Testament is liberally spiced with the word *promise*. Of its approximately seventy occurrences, only once does it refer to a statement or action of man (Acts 23:21). All of the others are in reference to God's promises to men. Peter seems here to envision all of the sweet blessings God has promised through the ages to those who serve Him, all of which are subsumed in John's observation: "And this is the promise which he promised us, even the life eternal" (1 John. 2:25).

This partaking is fraught with the keen responsibility of diligent cultivation of those traits that will nourish the Divine element in us and also keep us free from a corrupt world. Each of the eight traits (the familiar "Christian graces") (vv. 5–7), after the first one, is to be "supplied" out of its predecessor, rather than merely added to it. *Supply* is a word relating to an abundance rather than to a minimum. Our attitude toward these traits is spiritually pivotal. Their cultivation will bring:

- (1) Usefulness and fruitfulness in ever-increasing spiritual knowledge (v. 8)
- (2) Assurance to our calling and election (v. 10a)
- (3) Prevention from stumbling (v. 10b)
- (4) Ultimately, an abundant entrance into the Lord's eternal kingdom (v. 11)

Neglect of these traits will bring spiritual myopia, allowing us to see only present and immediate things, causing spiritual amnesia whereby we forget even our redemption from sin (v. 9). Such neglect destroys our fellowship in God's nature and condemns us eternally if persisted in.

APPLICATION OF THE TEXT

Having briefly expounded this context, let us now consider its relationship to the great theme of fellowship.

*Definition and Frequency of the Word, Fellowship*⁴

Partakers in 1 Peter 1:4 is very closely related to the word *fellowship*, which is found fifteen times in the King James Version and seventeen times in the American Standard Version. It is most frequently translated from the Greek word *koinonia*, of which *koinonos* (“partakers,” 1 Pet. 1:4) is a cognate. Kittel says: “It expresses a two-sided relation....emphasis may be on either the giving or the receiving. It thus means 1. ‘participation,’ 2. ‘impartation,’ 3. ‘fellowship.’”⁵ Strong lists the following ideas conveyed by *koinonia*: partnership, participation, social intercourse, pecuniary benefaction, to communicate, communion, contribution, distribution, fellowship.⁶ *Metochē*, a Greek synonym for *koinonia*, is translated “fellowship” once (KJV, 2 Cor. 6:14). Both *metochē* and *koinonia* are found in the passage just cited. Both the KJV and the ASV render *metochē* as “fellowship” and *koinonia* as “communion.” Thus, it is clear that fellowship involves two or more persons or organizations participating, sharing, having communion, or having things in common. Of the seventeen occurrences of *fellowship* in the ASV, one is from Luke, five are from John, and the remaining eleven are from Paul.

The subject of fellowship is also discussed in numerous passages that do not contain the word itself, but that nonetheless relate to the concept of fellowship. Kindred subjects are unity, withdrawal from and rejection of certain ones, “church discipline,” “reconciliation,” and others, as we will demonstrate in the development of this subject.

Persons/Congregations and Circumstances Involved

Fellowship in the New Testament involves relationships between mankind and Deity (“vertical”) and between fellow human beings (“horizontal”). Faithful children of God have fellowship with God the Father (1 John 1:3), with the Son of God (1 Cor. 1:9;

1 John 1:3), and with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14; Phi. 2:1). One way in which the Lord's people may have fellowship with Christ is by undergoing suffering on His behalf (Phi. 3:10).

Faithful children of God also have fellowship with one another **only because and if** they first have fellowship with Deity.

When men have the same father, they are brothers,⁷ and when two or more people come to partake of the Divine nature, a fellowship is established between said participants. This fellowship is clearly conditional, as opposed to universal or capricious. As Peter indicates (2 Pet. 1:1–4), fellowship embraces those who have:

1. Obtained a like precious faith
2. Been granted all things that pertain unto life and godliness through spiritual knowledge
3. Been called
4. Been given precious and exceeding great promises
5. Escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust

It should be manifest to even the simple-minded that the inclusive terms of this passage describe only a child of God, a Christian. This fellowship likewise obviously excludes those failing these qualifications, regardless of how pious they may look or the way they speak or act. The non-Christian does not partake of God's nature; therefore, he has no fellowship with the saints, and the Christian can have no fellowship with him. Even to suggest that the Lord's church bodily, or that saints individually, have any degree of spiritual fellowship with the unregenerate world of either infidelity or denominationalism is a form of infidelity itself. If some argue that this confines fellowship

too narrowly, they should remember that God Almighty has done the confining through His Word.

Many years ago, while I was waiting for a haircut, a Methodist preacher, already in the barber's chair, asked me if we in the churches of Christ still believed we were the only ones going to Heaven. Before I could answer, my barber, a faithful brother, said, "He goes further than that; he doesn't even believe all of his brethren will make it!" He spoke the truth. Not only do Christians not have any fellowship with non-Christians, even our fellowship with brethren is strictly conditional, as I will subsequently set forth. One can identify at least sixty-eight verses in the New Testament that relate directly to corrective discipline or to withdrawing and withholding fellowship from an impenitent brother. The brethren described in this large body of Scripture had/have clearly ceased to partake of the Divine nature and were/are no longer to be extended fellowship by the faithful.

Note the conditional statement of John in this regard: "But if we walk in the light as he [God] is in the light [i.e., if we are in fellowship with God], we have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7). Paul described the acceptance and endorsement extended to him and Barnabas by James, Peter, and John—men in fellowship with God—as giving to them the "the right hands of fellowship" (Gal. 2:9). John wrote what he did to the brethren in his first letter that they might have fellowship with him, and that they may know the way by which they had "fellowship one with another" (1 John 1:3, 7). While some brethren have suggested that the Lord's day contribution may be in view in Acts 2:42, I agree with Kittel that Luke's use of *fellowship* here is likely a reference to the "brotherly concord" that characterized those early saints in Jerusalem.⁸

One or more congregations may have fellowship with one or more individuals who are doing the Lord's work in some remote place. One way (certainly not the only

way) in which this may be done is by financially supporting a preacher. Paul spoke of the Philippian Church's "giving and receiving" involved in their support of him as having "fellowship" with him (Phi. 1:5; 4:15–16). Further, he understood that the fruit of his labors would accrue to their account to some degree because of their support of his work. Paul instructed the Galatian congregations to "communicate" (*koinoneito*, i.e., to associate themselves with "...in the way of aid and relief")⁹ unto their teachers (Gal. 6:6).

Moreover, one or more congregations may have fellowship with one or more other congregations in the Lord's work. One way (but again, not the only way) in which a congregation may have fellowship with another congregation is in financial support. Thus, when the church in Philippi sent support to Paul while he worked with the church in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:8–9), it was not only having fellowship with Paul, but also with the Corinthian Church. Likewise, when the church in Antioch sent relief to the churches (through their respective elders) in Judea, Antioch was extending "fellowship" to them in a very concrete way (Acts 11:27–30).

Attaining Fellowship

Human fellowship with God has never been and is not now universal and automatic. It has always been conditional and attainable only by complying with God's conditions. Man was in fellowship with God in the beginning, but he forfeited that fellowship when he sinned and God cast him out of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:9–24). Since then, with only the exception of the Son of God, men have sinned when they reached the "age of accountability": "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). That is, all human beings who have lived **have sinned** (aorist tense, which looks back over the behavior of mankind through all human history) and all who now live also **continue to sin** (present tense, men now sin and continue to sin). The

further implication is that this also describes the behavior of man until time is no more. Since God cannot abide sin in His presence, man could not be restored to fellowship with Him (reconciled) on his own because he could not attain to purity and sinlessness on his own. God has always required the offering of blood on the part of those who sought forgiveness of sins, which forgiveness is necessary if sinful men would attain fellowship with God (Heb. 9:22).

Consummate and final forgiveness could not be attained through the offering of the blood of bulls and goats, whether under the patriarchal or the Mosaical systems (Heb. 10:4). God's ultimate forgiveness of men required the ultimate sacrifice of the blood of a perfect man. None on earth could be found (Psa. 14:1; Rom. 3:10), so God, in His incomparable love for man, sent the Pre-existent Pre-incarnate Word to become incarnate as His Only Begotten Son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 1:30–35; John 1:1–2, 14; 3:16; Gal. 4:4–5). This sinless Son (Heb. 4:15), Jesus, the Christ, offered His own blood, not for His own sins, but for the sins of sinful men (Heb. 9:23–28; 10:10, 12, 14). By His unblemished, unspotted blood we are redeemed from sin (1 Pet. 1:18–19). He made those once far off near, “preached peace,” brought reconciliation to man with God in the one body, His church (Eph. 1:22–23), and made it possible for former strangers to God to be fellow-citizens of His household (2:13–19). He did all of this through the cross (i.e., the shedding of His blood) (v. 16).

Having paid the price which would enable man once more to attain fellowship with God, the Christ had every right to stipulate conditions on which fellowship could be attained. He did so in the Gospel, the message of good news, which declares: (1) that men can now be reconciled to God and once more enjoy His fellowship and (2) upon what conditions men can attain that blissful fellowship. Thus, the Gospel “...is the power of God unto salvation...” (Rom. 1:16). Reformers of the sixteenth century such as John

Calvin and Martin Luther, reacting to damnable Roman Catholic dogma, foisted an equally horrible aberration of God's glorious plan for man's redemption upon the world. Curiously, they advocated that God's grace is unconditional and at the same time that man is saved solely by his faith (obviously, faith is a condition). Of course, if grace (thus fellowship with God) were unconditional, not even faith would be necessary, and unbelievers would be saved. Salvation would therefore be universal because God desires all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; Tit. 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9).

This heresy would stand exposed were there only **one** *salvation-if* passage in the Gospel, but there are many (Mark 16:16; Luke 13:3, 5; John 3:5; 8:24; Acts 2:38; 17:30; 22:16; Heb. 5:9; et al.). It is a shame beyond description that some who were once faithful saints and strong for the Truth, including elders and deacons, have now taken up this perverse doctrine. Calvin, rather than the Christ, is the source of Rubel Shelly's infamous statement on this subject: "It is a scandalous and outrageous lie to teach that salvation arises from human activity. We do not contribute one whit to our salvation."¹⁰ Numerous others who were once in fellowship with God have also echoed such "grace only" sentiments.

Most certainly then, fellowship with God is conditional, and those conditions are set forth simply and understandably in the New Testament. Summarized, those conditions are as follows. Men must:

1. Hear the saving Gospel (Rom. 10:14b) and believe it (Mark 16:15–16)
2. Believe in the Christ of the Gospel (John 8:24; 20:30–31; Rom. 1:16)
3. Repent of their sins (Luke 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 17:30)
4. Orally confess before others the faith they have in their hearts that the Christ is the Son of God and their Lord (Mat. 16:16; Acts 8:37 [KJV]; Rom. 10:9–10; 1 Tim. 6:12)

5. Be baptized (immersed in water) for the purpose of receiving forgiveness of their sins through the blood of Christ (Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38, 41; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:20–21; et al.)

Upon obeying this grace-motivated (Tit. 2:11), mercy-filled (3:5), Heaven-sent (1 Pet. 1:12), blood-bought (2:18–19) plan of salvation, men are cleansed from their sins, not by works of their own righteousness, but by the perfect blood of Christ as they obey Him. Having their sins washed away in the blood of Christ in the act of baptism (Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5), God the Father can—and does—receive them into His fellowship and that of His Son and the Holy Spirit.

How does the church of the Lord relate to this grand plan and to man's attainment of fellowship with God? Note that all who obey the Lord's plan of salvation and are thus saved (and no others) are added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47), the one Christ built (Mat. 16:18). Thus the church is composed of those (and no others) who have come into fellowship with the Godhead by having obeyed Christ's plan of salvation, being thereby cleansed by His blood. Of Christians (and no others) Paul wrote that "...the Father... delivered us out the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love (Col. 1:12–13). *Kingdom* is another term for the church (Mat. 16:18–19, 28; Heb. 12:23, 28). Only the kingdom (church) of Christ will be delivered safely up to the Father at the coming of Christ, implying its fellowship with God (1 Cor. 15:24). Christ will save only His church, His spiritual "body" (Eph. 5:23). The church of Christ is the household (family) of God (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15), another figure which indicates that it is in fellowship with Him. To summarize, only those who have obeyed the Gospel plan of salvation—and are thereby in the church/kingdom of Christ—have attained fellowship with God. The church (and only the church) is the "depository" of those who are saved and who have thus attained to fellowship with God (Acts 2:47).

Maintaining Fellowship

Men who have once known the blessed fellowship of God and His Son may so behave as to forfeit it. Thus not only must men **attain** fellowship with God; they must so live as to **maintain** it. In the context of describing our fellowship with God as “walking in the light,” John wrote plainly: “If we say that we have fellowship with him [God] and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 John 1:6). Once more, John Calvin made an egregious error at this juncture. His doctrine of perseverance of the saints (i.e., “once in God’s fellowship, always in God’s fellowship”) has misled multiplied millions (if not billions) over the four centuries since his time and even now holds tens of millions in its thrall of false security. In Calvin’s system, once one has attained fellowship with God (i.e., salvation), he is irrevocably locked in; he can never believe, think, say, or do anything that will cause God to withdraw or cease it. As with the former heresy, so with this one, some of those who were once in fellowship with God have been infected by it and are teaching that God has an “umbrella of grace” whereby His children “automatically” remain in His grace. However, the New Testament specifies various sins that will cause a child of God to forfeit his fellowship with God and be lost eternally if not repented of (1 Cor. 6:9–11; Gal. 5:19–21; Eph. 5:5; et al.).

Withdrawing Fellowship

The horizontal dimension of fellowship (fellowship between men) is determined by and dependent upon the vertical (fellowship between man and God). As set out above, only when (and not until) men become children of God, do they then (and only then) attain fellowship with other children of God. It follows that, when a person ceases to be in fellowship with God (i.e., is “fallen away from grace” [Gal. 5:4]), those still in God’s fellowship cannot extend fellowship to such brethren. It therefore should come as

no surprise that numerous passages command the Lord's faithful people to cease having fellowship with certain of their brethren and for a variety of reasons:

1. Teaching false doctrine (Rom. 16:17–18; 1 Tim. 1:3; 19–20; 6:20–21; 2 John 9–11)
2. Causing ungodly division (note that **not all** division is ungodly) (Mat. 18:15–17; Rom. 16:17–18; Acts 20:29–31; Tit. 1:11–13; 3:10)
3. Committing various sins of immorality, ungodliness, disobedience, laziness, and rebellion (1 Cor. 5:1–9; 2 The. 3:6, 11, 14; Tit. 1:10)

The reason faithful brethren cannot have fellowship with brethren who are disorderly is the same reason the church cannot have fellowship with those outside the church: Due to their sinful lives, neither alien sinners nor impenitent saints are in fellowship with God. Scripture demands that the faithful withdraw from and cease their fellowship with impenitent “disorderly” brethren (Mat. 18:17; Rom. 16:17–18; 1 Cor. 5:4–11; Eph. 5:11; 2 The. 3:6, 14–15; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:5; Tit. 3:10–11; 2 John 9–11).

Three major purposes are stated for such withdrawal action:

1. To make the sinner so ashamed, if possible, that he will repent and be saved (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 The. 3:14; 1 Tim. 1:20)
2. To spare the church his evil influence (1 Cor. 5:6)
3. To prevent any appearance of endorsement of sin or error (2 John 11)

When these explicit instructions are compared with the current attitudes and actions among our brethren, a nauseous disappointment settles over those who love the purity of the truth and the kingdom.

Liberalism and Fellowship

Because of negligence among many brethren at this most basic point, the false teacher and the sinner have been allowed to flourish over the past few decades, creating a fellowship crisis. Administrators of universities founded and supported by brethren have defended and shielded professors who have taught egregious error to several thousands of our young people. Many of those thus trained have eagerly embraced and proclaimed the rank error they were taught and have increasingly filled brotherhood pulpits over the past few decades. Rather than reproof and dismissing such pulpiteers, elderships/congregations have tolerated, encouraged, and supported them, creating a massive liberal malignancy in the body of Christ that has captured hundreds, if not thousands of congregations of spiritual Israel. A large percentage of members of the church are now represented by what one can accurately describe as the “*Christian Chronicle* element.” This monthly tabloid, owned and published by Oklahoma Christian University, has for several years given extensive and very favorable publicity to all things liberal among brethren (including individuals, schools, congregations, and brotherhood projects).

These folk, who still masquerade as God’s people (and while hypocritically keeping “Church of Christ” signs on their buildings), occupy the ironic and contradictory position of endorsing, preaching, and practicing the very doctrines and practices God has called us to fight. Such apostates are doing their utmost to forge a widespread union with the Independent Christian Church with no repentance on their part. This is in spite of the fact that, beginning more than a century ago, their efforts eventuated in a grievous division upon the church by forcing unauthorized innovations upon congregations. For faithful disciples, John’s description of the “anti-Christ” of his day well fits these liberals of our day:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us (1 John 2:19).

A “New Approach” to Fellowship

A new crisis involving fellowship has now arisen among a host of brethren who have known, esteemed, and worked in close harmony with one another over many years—in some cases, over decades—all of whom once considered each other unquestionably doctrinally sound and faithful. These brethren for the most part had a history of staunchly standing together against the inroads of the blatant liberalism described earlier. They had for years quoted and correctly applied the several clarion passages concerning the limits of fellowship as they preached the Word (Rom. 16:17–18; 1 Cor. 5:1–13; Eph. 5:11; 1 John 1:6–7; 4:1; John 9–11; et al.). The crisis arose from the determination of certain ones of these brethren to support an institution that has admittedly produced much good material over many years. This institution suffered great damage in 2005 because of a scandal involving its long-time executive director, for which scandal he was dismissed.¹¹

Events surrounding the clamor to preserve the above-referenced institution in the face of the scandal have exposed a fatal weakness in many of these “sound” brethren—a weakness concerning the practice of Scriptural fellowship. Those bent on supporting and maintaining said institution found themselves on the horns of an uncomfortable dilemma. The newly appointed executive director of said institution brought with him some heavy doctrinal and practical baggage. (Some of his doctrinal errors and practices have been well-known and fully documented for several years, while others have come to light more recently.)¹² Suddenly (and almost incredibly), those who felt compelled to lend their names to the effort to sustain the institution seemed to forget (at least in

regard to the executive director of said institution) the many years some of them had faithfully preached on Biblical fellowship and the many New Testament passages on the subject in their memory banks.

While they have rightly opposed and refused all fellowship with the first-described liberal element over the years, in these recent events they have consciously abandoned that stance regarding this one brother and the institution he directs and represents. Rather than behaving toward and concerning him as the false teacher he is, they have been willing to embrace, defend, endorse, and continue to use the services of this brother, in spite of his errors. An error in doctrine or practice is usually not “lonely” for very long. As the one unclean spirit sought and attracted seven others to join him (Mat. 12:43–45), just so, an initial compromise or error soon attracts other compromises and errors to accompany it. Not long after the institution referenced above felt its support-base threatened and brethren compromised Biblical fellowship to prevent the occurrence of such, another institution’s financial base was threatened. The director of this institution defused the threat by bowing to pressure from the threateners, which required further compromises by the director of said institution (and his associates) to do so.¹³

Rationality demanded that, if one held the erring brother accountable for his errors, one could not support the institution of which he is the head. Contrariwise, one could not support the institution which he directs, without implicitly supporting him. Unfortunately, those who have been insistent on supporting the institution have not let rationality deter them. Many of us who have worked closely with so many of these brethren through the years have been “amazingly amazed” as they have irrationally “rationalized” endorsing, defending, and continuing to employ the talents of the brother in order to support and preserve his institution. They have simply chosen to disregard

his history of error in doctrine and practice. So desperate have they been to defend this brother, they have issued a variety of absurd excuses for him and for their illicit fellowship with him, as the following list indicates:

1. “The brother has said that his involvement in the elder reaffirmation/reconfirmation procedure was a ‘mistake’ and he would not do it again” (he has since told some that he does not recall making this statement, oft-repeated by his defenders, and he has told more than one questioner, he “would do it [i.e., elder r/r] again”).
2. “We support the institution, but not its director or any errors of which he may be guilty” (this claim was so patently illogical and unscriptural [Eph. 1:22–23; 5:11; 2 John 9–11] that its makers soon saw its folly and abandoned it as indefensible).
3. “We have no objection to the elder reaffirmation/reconfirmation program as advocated and practiced by this brother” (all the while they continue to state vigorously and publicly that they have been in the past and at present are opposed to elder reaffirmation/re-confirmation).
4. “This brother has issued a statement denying he advocates error regarding elder reaffirmation/reconfirmation or the “intent doctrine” regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage” (his “statement” was actually little more than a defense of his erroneous positions and a not-so-thinly-veiled attack on those who have dared oppose his errors).¹⁴
5. “This brother denies that he believes the doctrines he is accused of believing. If you don’t believe him, just ask him” (the problem here is that he has said and written far too much to deny his belief in the errors he holds and remain credible).
6. “Why should we be concerned over things that happened sixteen years ago?” (as if the passing of time were a substitute for repentance).

7. “One cannot know the ‘context’ or ‘intent’ of this brother’s words by merely reading a transcript of some of his oral speeches or listening to a tape; one must talk with him personally to know his meaning” (if this claim is so, then how can we know anything about “context” or “intent” of inspired writers whom we can never personally question?).
8. “Unless one was actually in the assembly and heard this erring brother deliver his speeches that resulted in the erroneous practices concerning elder selection, one is in no position to question what was said or done” (how then did those who offer this excuse have the right to question such apostates as Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado, the Pope in Rome, et al.?).
9. “Those who accuse this brother of error are misrepresenting him, and he will set the record straight if they will just call him” (I have not heard or seen any misrepresentations, only **correct actual quotations** from this brother in his own words; the evidence is both clear and abundant of his teaching and practice, and besides, this brother has given an interesting variety of answers to various callers who asked identical questions).
10. “It [i.e., the elder reaffirmation/reconfirmation doctrine/practice] is not worth dividing the church over” (perhaps the most revealing of all attempts to excuse the elder reaffirmation/reconfirmation error and its principal proponent; I suppose this declaration is intended to signal the end of all controversy and discussion over this egregious doctrinal and practical heresy).

Item number 10 above is indeed a bold declaration, and it implies even more than it explicitly states. It implies that the doctrine and practice are false, but it makes the judgment that it is just not “false enough” to warrant serious concern—never mind that it strikes at the very heart of God’s plan for congregational polity for His church.

According to God's plan of "church organization," **only** men who meet specific Scriptural qualifications are to serve as elders in His congregations (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Tit. 1:5–9). The practice of this error fundamentally alters the Lord's pattern concerning elders no less than the second-century departure from God's plan did, but it is "not worth dividing the church over." That first step led over the next few centuries to full-blown Romanism with all of its ungodly papal and hierarchical structure.

This unauthorized procedure makes of the local congregation little more than a mere voting constituency that has the power to select or deselect men as elders on **more** than God's Scriptural qualifications, but it is "not worth dividing the church over." The brother who implemented this plan has, among other things, added a new qualification to those given by the Holy Spirit, namely that a man must be "perceived" as a "leader" or he is not fit to serve as an elder, even if he meets all of God's qualifications, but this new qualification is "not worth dividing the church over."¹⁵

A second implication of item number 10 above is the following: Those who continue to **oppose** the error relating to selection/deselection of elders and its foremost advocate among brethren are responsible for dividing the church. The supporters of this erring brother thereby employ one of the oldest "tricks in the book," which all rebels against Truth and righteousness characteristically and eventually seem to follow: "When faced with deserved blame for your own sins, blame your critics for the very thing of which you yourself are guilty." Wicked Ahab thus blamed God's fiery, faithful prophet, Elijah, as "the troubler of Israel" (1 Kin. 18:17). Elijah rightly responded: "I have not troubled Israel; but thou..." (v. 18). In like manner these brethren, strangely sympathizing with a false teacher and feigning blindness to his fatal errors, are accusing those who hold him, his errors, and his champions accountable of being "church dividers." With Elijah, we rightly say: "We have not troubled Israel; but thou."

These brethren have as much credibility in such a charge as Shelly, Lucado, Deaver, or any other false teacher has had in hurling *church divider* at their accurate accusers (among whom these recent error-sympathizers belong)—**absolutely none**. The “progressives” of the nineteenth century “drove the wedge that split the log” by forcing the instrument and the missionary society upon a harmonious, united brotherhood. Just so, these new “progressives” in the church are “driving the splitting wedge” ever deeper by their dedicated endeavor to force this brother and his error upon a once harmonious, united brotherhood. Numerous individuals and some congregations have marked this erring brother and his errors by public exposure of same. However, the one case of “formal” fellowship withdrawal involving this brother and his doctrine was done by a congregation whose elders have defended him, and their withdrawal was **against** an eldership that dared expose his errors.¹⁶

In an article dealing specifically with the aforementioned withdrawal, Gary Summers correctly observed the following:

The evidence against Dave Miller is plain and open to all. When the elders at Highland [Church of Christ] in Dalton [GA] withdrew fellowship from the Northside Church in Calhoun [GA], in effect they withdrew from all of us who stand with the Northside elders in opposing Dave Miller until he repents of and repudiates the errors he has committed. Likewise, all of those who stand with the Highland elders in their unscriptural withdrawal and in their endorsement of Dave Miller, have **implicitly withdrawn from the rest of us**. Many of us cannot recognize the withdrawal... against the Northside elders..., who are standing for the Truth.... And if the Highland elders, GBN, and all who support GBN and Dave Miller choose not to fellowship the rest of us, they will surely have to give an account for that decision before our Lord and Savior.¹⁷

This unauthorized and unjustified withdrawal undeniably created a demonstrable division in which every brother finds himself on one “side” or the other of the line the Highland Church, led by her elders, drew. One dare not overlook the fact that those who

have transgressed Biblical fellowship were the perpetrators of this dividing line. Blissful fellowship has been broken, but by whom? The wonderful unity we once knew has been shattered, but by whom? The answers to these questions are found in the answer to another question: “Who have **changed** and **moved** from their long-held, Scriptural attitude and action toward error and its advocates?” Our fellowship and unity have been fractured by those brethren who have decided to take a broader view of fellowship in order to support their human institutions. If the church is divided, **they, not we**, are the dividers.

By what right did the aforementioned apologist for the brother in error and his false doctrine (see item number 10) decide which errors **are** “worth dividing the church over” and which ones **are not** “worth dividing the church over”? **In what way** (i.e., by what rule, standard, Scriptural statement or principle) did he determine which errors **are not** “worth dividing the church over”? Jesus’ enemies had no right to ask Him the following questions: “By what authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority?” (Mat. 21:23). However, since the originator (whoever he may have been) of item number 10 above is not the Lord Jesus, the foregoing questions are perfectly appropriate for him. His approach to the error relating to elders raises the question of what his attitude would have been toward certain matters that occurred in the first century, had he lived then:

- Would he have decided that the error of Ananias and Sapphira was **not** “worth” their being struck dead, although the Lord thought it was (Acts 5:1–11)?
- Would he have judged that causing unnecessary division by teaching error was **not** “worth” warning the church to turn away from such ones, although Paul thus warned brethren (Rom. 16:17–18)?

- Would he have determined that Peter’s dissimulation at Antioch was **not** “worth” Paul’s public rebuke of Peter (Gal. 2:11–14)?
- Would he have pronounced that walking “disorderly” was **not** “worth” withdrawing fellowship over, as Paul commanded (2 The. 3:6)?
- Would he have ruled that the failure to abide in and teach the doctrine of Christ (i.e., doctrine authorized by, proceeding from, Christ) was **not** “worth” refusing to aid and abet a false teacher, as John indicated it was (2 John 9–11)?
- Would he have opined that “adding to” the Word of God was **not** “worth” dividing the church over, as John implied it was (Rev. 22:18)?

Some additional questions are also in order in response to the claim that the unauthorized elder selection/deselection program is “not worth dividing the church over”:

- Is support of any man-made institution, regardless of its perceived value in the past, “worth dividing the church over”?
- Is support of any man-made institution worth compromising on the subject of Biblical fellowship in order to maintain and sustain said institution?
- Is support of any man-made institution worth attempting to “explain away” doctrinal and/or practical error?
- Is support of any man-made institution worth ignoring the long history of error in a brother?

The brethren who support our erring brother and his institution formerly proved themselves brave and strong as defenders of the faith and as respecters of Biblical limitations concerning fellowship of error and its advocates. They did so with such men as Rubel Shelly and all of his Nashville cohorts, Max Lucado and his liberal sycophants

and fellow-travelers, and more recently, Mac Deaver and the supporters of his Holy Spirit errors. However, those who once stood strong have in this case become so enamored and enthralled with a mere human institution that they have proved themselves cowardly and weak—**respecters of persons** rather than respecters of the limitations of Biblical fellowship—regarding its director’s errors.

These new “unity-in-diversity” practitioners should not be surprised if Mac Deaver accuses them of practicing “respect of persons.” After all, they strongly opposed Deaver’s doctrine and refused to fellowship him, but they have more recently “observed the passover” concerning the errors of this other brother. I say “more recently” because before May 2005, when his “sacred cow” institution’s very existence was threatened by scandal, many of those now defending this brother and excusing his errors, were opposing him and his errors. On second thought, Deaver would likely **not** make this call, for, the brother who has been given the free pass **refuses to deny that he agrees with Deaver’s direct-operation-of-the-Holy Spirit theology**. (Note: If this erring brother now being defended agrees with Deaver, how does one reconcile the relentless exposure, opposition, and refutation regarding Deaver (which I agree is fully deserved) on the part of many, with their eager endorsement, support, and defense regarding this other brother? Is this not a glaring contradiction?)

The Devil Takes Short Steps

Compromise in matters of religion can be such a deceptive and sneaky thing. Once one has taken the first step down this road, it is difficult to turn back or find its end. The devil always takes short, incremental steps in advancing his cause. No full-blown apostasy has ever occurred overnight or instantly. The initial decision these once-stalwart brethren made to compromise on the issue of fellowship in order to preserve their treasured institution has already moved considerably beyond where they began.

Many of these brethren now freely fellowship those whom they formerly refused, with good reason, to bid Godspeed. This new “unity” would be laudable if it were based upon needed changes that reflected adherence to the Truth, but alas, Truth is not its foundation.

A single common aspiration—**preservation of a human institution at whatever cost**—has drawn these brethren together and caused them to ignore errors they once counted grievous.¹⁸ These brethren have adopted entirely new vistas of fellowship compared to what they had several months ago.¹⁹ Their behavior in regard to fellowship and their ability to blind themselves to a brother deeply involved in error has been both breath-taking and staggering to those of us who thought we knew them well. What they have instigated is nothing less than a new “unity-in-diversity” movement. They have moved at a dizzying pace beyond that first step of compromise on fellowship. It is difficult to imagine where or how they will find a stopping place. Since they punched that first hole in the dam, the hole has rapidly become much larger. If they do not turn back soon, it will be too large to repair.

This new “unity-in-diversity” coalition has dusted off an old (and good) term and adopted it as its rallying point. That term is *balance*. *Balance* has now become a word as beautiful and sacred to them as the word *unity* is to the ultra-liberals who have left the Truth in ever larger numbers over the past four decades, as described earlier. As a very young preacher in the early 1960s, I vividly recall the cry that began to go up from some of the preachers a few years older than I. Many of these were men who had earned graduate degrees from denominational seminaries. They came home weary of sound doctrine and of criticisms from their denominational preacher-peers. Others, not of this educated-elite class, were also chafing under the restraints of sound doctrine. From among these restless brethren emerged the “The Man or the Plan” foolishness,

alleging that preachers in the Lord's church had for years over-emphasized the "plan" (i.e., doctrine) while neglecting the "Man" (i.e., the "person" of Jesus) in our preaching (an accusation as baseless as the liberal complaint that conservatives never preach on "grace").

These fellows complained that we had been too "dogmatic," "negative," "self-righteous," and therefore unnecessarily "offensive" in our preaching. They perceived our approach over the years to be "unbalanced" (never mind that it was Biblical and that the church had grown enormously under such preaching in the two decades following World War II). They began calling for "balance" and a "positive" approach. Dale Carnegie's *How To Win Friends and Influence People* and Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* all but replaced the Bible as a textbook and sermon source for these men. Those who did not buy their "program" were identified by them as "radicals" and "extremists" (is this beginning to sound familiar?). In light of the history of our brethren over the past four decades, I greatly fear where these most recent fellowship compromises and this new-found emphasis on "balance" will take them—along with a large number of naive and uninformed brethren. The Lord's warning is by no means obsolete: "Let them alone: they are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit" (Mat. 15:14).

Surely, none will deny **in principle** the need for balance in preaching the Gospel and in living the Christian life, **as long as we allow the New Testament to determine the meaning of *balance***. Accordingly, I cannot conceive of any one who is not concerned with attempting to be "balanced" and with avoiding properly-defined "extremism." However, the new "unity-in-diversity" element apparently believes it alone has a patent on the term's definition. Those whom they have ostracized from their fellowship are automatically, by definition, "unbalanced." We have earned this

appellation primarily because we refused to support an institution with a false teacher as its director (see Eph. 5:11). We are “unbalanced” because we dared to **expose** this brother and his errors instead of **embracing** him in his error (see Eph. 5:11). We became “unbalanced” when we had the audacity to refuse to “go along to get along” with those “balanced” brethren who support, endorse, defend, and fellowship this erring brother and his institution (see Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9–11).

These newly-defined, self-proclaimed “balanced” brethren have proved themselves capable of some very colorful vocabulary in describing those whom they perceive to be “unbalanced.” The following terms are only some of the ones gleaned from some of their “balanced” articles over the past several months: *self-proclaimed defenders of the faith, radicals, caustic, rude, arrogant, unkind, obnoxious, disagreeable, far right leaning, judgmental, censorious, self-righteous, unforgiving, fight-pickers, slanderers, damaging, vicious, those who are seeking to crush others, are intent on making someone look stupid, are more dangerous than liberals, and are wholly obsessed with fulltime heretic detection.*

Would it be out of order to ask if the hurlers of the epithets in the foregoing list are demonstrating “balance”? Does one show “balance” in strongly worded condemnations of brethren for engaging in strongly worded condemnations of brethren? Is one “balanced” who spews negative outcries against those whom they accuse of being “negative”? Is it a mark of being “balanced” to use biting and devouring verbiage to assert that some brethren are biting and devouring others? Does *balanced* describe those who employ toxic terminology to describe what they perceive to be a small, toxic loyalty circle?²⁰

So many listen to or read religious subject matter and judge it almost wholly by its “tone” or by whether it is “negative” or “positive” in its approach. These reactions

reflect wholly subjective standards. One rule should primarily govern one's reaction to religious subject matter, whether delivered by the written or spoken word: Does this message represent the facts of the case and the Word of God as it applies to those facts? If it does, whatever may be the "tone" of the material or whether or not the reader/listener may "like" the perceived "attitude" of the writer/speaker, the truth is not altered thereby—truth is still truth. Any other approach to what one hears or reads is merely an emotional, rather than a rational, objective response.

Granted, some readers/listeners may be more inclined to hear a given message that is delivered in gentler rather than stronger terms, but as long as the Truth is delivered, the message is no less true, regardless of the terms in which it is packaged. I am distressed to see brethren almost nonchalantly rejecting factual, documented evidence relating to Gospel Truth and doctrinal error on such totally irrational bases as, "He's too mean-spirited," "I don't like his attitude," or "He is so negative." They seem to reason that, if they don't like the messenger or his manner of conveying the message, they are justified in rejecting the message in spite of the evidence of its truthfulness. They play out the ages-old drama of "shooting the messenger" because they despise the message. (Have not denominationalists, in their blind prejudice, followed this pattern of response to the Truth for generations?) Doubtless, because of just such irrational responses many of the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, elders, and doctors of the law rejected the Truth our Lord taught. They turned away, offended by the His mean-spirited tone and the negative attitude conveyed by His harsh and heavy-handed words (Mat. 15:1–9, 12–14). They not only turned away offended; they turned away lost.

CONCLUSION

For sake of emphasis, let us review: True unity and fellowship with one's brethren have always been conditional. Before men can be spiritually united with each

other they must all come into fellowship with God and remain in fellowship with Him. John wrote: “But if we walk in the light, as he [God] is in the light, we have fellowship one with another...” (1 John 1:7). This oneness/fellowship is so precious that we are to strive diligently to maintain it (Eph. 4:3). There are few things more delightful on earth than genuine unity and harmony among brethren: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psa. 133:1). Because genuine unity and fellowship are so sweet, precious, and pleasant, faithful brethren find the pain almost excruciating when the blessed peace is broken. This prized unity and fellowship, which so many brethren at one time and for so long enjoyed, have been shattered. The cause is clear: Certain brethren have made a conscious choice to compromise the Truth, and others of us refuse to do so, whatever the cost.

Those of us who are elders, preachers, and teachers of God's Word must preach and teach on this theme with renewed frequency and zeal to meet the crisis of both the present and the future. The recent actions of various influential “conservative” brethren is dangerously blurring (whether intentionally or unintentionally) the line of fellowship the inspired men drew for all time. This “balanced” new direction, if persisted in, will result in a new apostasy as surely as this same “balanced” new direction that arose four decades ago did. God’s line of fellowship is a **dividing** line, as well as a **uniting** line. Just as it divides those who are in the kingdom of light from those who are still under the power of darkness, so surely does it divide those who are determined to abide in the Truth from those who are willing to ignore and excuse error. If the battle among brethren is lost at the point of fellowship, it is lost utterly in regard to keeping the church pure.

ENDNOTES

1. This chapter is an expansion of a chapter written by the author and published in *The Church and Fellowship—Freed-Hardeman College 1974 Lectures*, ed. William Woodson (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman college, 1974).

2. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

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3. Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, NY: American Book Co., 1889), p. 661.
 4. Some of the material in this section originally appeared in *Heaven's Imperative or Man's Innovations: Shall We Restructure the Church of Christ?* ed. Curtis A. Cates (Memphis, TN: Memphis School of Preaching, 1995).
 5. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1965), 3:798.
 6. James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1979), p. 43 (Greek Dictionary at end of Concordance).
 7. This Scriptural Truth should not be confused with Max Lucado's heretical dictum that anyone who **calls** God his "Father" is his brother. Millions who call God "Father" have completely ignored and/or rejected the only way God's Word instructs men whereby they may become His children.
 8. Kittel, 3:809.
 9. *The Analytical Greek Lexicon* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers Pub., n.d.), p. 235.
 10. Rubel Shelly, "ARBEIT MACHT FREI!" in *Love Lines* (Nashville, TN: Woodmont Hills Church of Christ, Oct. 31, 1990).
 11. The institution is Apologetics Press in Montgomery, AL, whose founding Executive Director, brother Bert Thompson, was dismissed in May 2005.
 12. Brother Dave Miller was appointed Executive Director of AP following the dismissal of Thompson. Miller advocated and helped execute an elder reaffirmation/reconfirmation program at the Brown Trail Church of Christ, Bedford, TX, in 1990, where he was one of the preachers at the time. I initially expressed my objections to this procedure in a letter dated May 23, 1990. This letter was written to brother Goebel Music in response to his letter, which outlined the program and expressed his reservations about it. He was attending the Brown Trail Congregation at the time. By assignment of brother Michael Hatcher, Director of the Bellview Lectures, Pensacola, FL, I fully documented this procedure and exposed its errors in the 1997 Bellview Lectures on "Leadership." Miller was complicit in a repeat of this procedure at Brown Trail in 2002, shortly before he moved to Montgomery, AL, to work with Apologetics Press. (Upon announcement that he would be joining Apologetics Press, Thompson, Executive Director of AP at the time, who hired him, received warnings about brother Miller's false positions from numerous sources. AP suffered considerable financial loss from congregations and individuals because of Miller's hiring and Thompson's resistance [angry at times] to criticism of Miller.) This second program was documented in *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*, Oct. 2002, by Marvin Weir. Somewhat before this, Miller had excused the divorce of a prospective student, allowing him to enroll in Brown Trail Preacher Training School, of which Miller was the Director. The excuse was that the student and his cousin (whom he married so that he might obtain U.S. residency) never intended to really be husband and wife, so there never was a real marriage (in spite of their signatures on the license application and the marriage certificate). Miller elevated this student to be his Assistant Director of BTPTS (see David Brown's article in *Contending for the Faith*, Aug. 2005, pp. 6–9). Furthermore, Miller has followed a compromising course regarding fellowship with false teachers and at least one apostate congregation since 1995 (see Holger Neubauer's article in *Living Oracles*, March 2001; "The Final Word," MS prepared by elders, Northside Church of Christ, Calhoun, GA, Dec. 2006). Miller refuses to answer questions regarding his views concerning the direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the Christian (Terry Hightower wrote him by e-mail on Feb. 17, 2006, asking his position on same, and never received a response. He wrote Miller the same letter a bit later and sent it by USPS, return receipt required. Miller signed for delivery, but never responded.)
 13. My "Summation" of events relating to the scandal involving Apologetics Press and Thompson was circulated widely in June 2005 (without either my intention or permission). My document so enraged brother Frank Chesser (preacher, Panama St., Church of Christ, Montgomery, AL, where most of the AP staff were members) that he wrote a vicious letter to me and mailed it to hundreds of brethren. This letter stirred up some brethren who had a deep loyalty to AP, at least one of whom was a generous financial supporter of Memphis School of Preaching. At that time, I was Editor of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*, and brother Cates was both Director of MSOP and President of the Board of TGJ, Inc., owner of the paper. This generous MSOP contributor did not like my notes concerning AP, and he let brother Cates know it, threatening financial harm to MSOP unless he took action against me. Others also let Cates know they did not like the forthright approach in proclaiming and defending the Truth we had taken for over five years in the pages of *TGJ*. This group threatened to harm the paper if brother Cates allowed me to remain its Editor. Brother Cates proved himself more loyal to maintaining the human institutions of which he was the head than he did to me and my consistent emphasis in the paper over the five and one-half years of its existence, which emphasis he had constantly encouraged and praised. Accordingly, on July

19, 2005, in an all-day meeting of TGJ, Inc., Board, he persuaded the remainder of the board that an editorial change was required. On July 20, under intense pressure to do so, I resigned as Editor and brother Dave Watson resigned as Associate Editor of *TGJ*. It has since, under its new co-editors, pursued a “balanced” (by the board’s definition) agenda. An additional note: On July 28, brother Michael Hatcher, TGJ, Inc., Board Secretary (and the Board’s spokesman in the July 20 meeting and newly-appointed temporary Editor of *TGJ*), made the motion to the Board that I be reinstated as Editor of *TGJ*. When his motion was rejected (in strongly vituperative terms by brother Joseph Meador), Hatcher resigned from the Board on July 29. On August 11 he issued a public apology to Dave Watson and me, saying in part:

It now appears to me that there has been a concerted effort to destroy the reputation of a good man—Dub McClish. I apologize for my part in being used to further their cause. I am sorry for not doing some of the things that I should have done and not realizing what was taking place (especially behind the scenes) so I would not have had a part in it. Brother McClish had done nothing worthy of being forced to resign, but it appears to me that the board bowed to pressure to get rid of him, and I was made an unknowing accomplice [sic] in this. This pressure began with Frank Chesser’s hate-filled response to brother McClish’s summation of the Apologetics Press Scandal (which none of the board members thought there was any sin involved). But apparently, to support Apologetics Press, brother McClish was sacrificed as was *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL* itself. I sincerely apologize to Dub McClish, David Watson, and the brotherhood for my part in this sad state of affairs.

14. See Miller’s statement and my response in *Defender*, October 2005; see Dave Watson’s response to Miller’s statement in *Contending for the Faith*, Nov.-Dec. 2005.

15. Dave Miller, sermon at Brown Trail Church of Christ, April 8, 1990, in which he explained the elder r/r procedure the church would follow (see David Watson’s article referenced above).

16. The Highland Church of Christ, Dalton, GA, withdrew fellowship from only the elders of the Northside Church of Christ, Calhoun, GA, on October 30, 2005. This withdrawal action specifically excluded the preacher and remainder of the church, which action is as unscriptural as it is ridiculous. The Northside elders expressed concern to the Highland elders because of their endorsement of Apologetics Press and Dave Miller. The causes for this concern were the close geographical proximity of Highland to Northside and that Highland was soliciting funds for its huge Gospel Broadcasting Network, which planned to use speakers from Apologetics Press, including Miller, in its programming. Full details of the events leading up to this withdrawal and Northside’s response to it are available from the Northside elders: Elders, Northside Church of Christ, 700 Jolly Rd., NW, Calhoun, GA 30701 or from Ron Hall (one of the Northside elders) at ronhalloffice@bellsouth.net.

17. Gary W. Summers, *Contending for the Faith*, April 2006, pp. 16–18.

18. The aim of those who oppose brother Miller and Apologetics Press has never been simply to oppose and/or destroy this institution per se. Rather, our aim has been (and is) to abide by New Testament doctrine regarding fellowship whatever the cost, including allowing any human institution that interferes with this aim to perish, if necessary.

19. A case in point is the following: The retiring Director of Memphis School of Preaching, brother Curtis A. Cates, has not been secretive about his deep suspicions of and lack of respect for Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver over a rather long period of time, a view with which many of us have concurred and still concur. Consequently, none of the MSOP faculty would have anything to do with the Denver school for years until 2006, when rather abruptly, an MSOP faculty member became part of the BVVID adjunct faculty. Further, the 2007 MSOP Lectureship roster includes brethren Denny Petrillo, Director of BVVID, and Neal Pollard, preacher for the Bear Valley Church of Christ, home of said school. I am unaware of any recent basic change of direction at BVVID, but the once-objectionable things to those at MSOP seem objectionable no more. One other thing: The Bear Valley Church carried out its own elder reevaluation/reconfirmation program in recent years.

Another case in point is that MSOP’s attitude toward East Tennessee School of Preaching has been negative for many years, and again, with good reason, many have believed. It has had a history over several years of inviting seriously questionable speakers (e.g., “Nashville Jubilee” speakers, et al.). Brother Cates has privately even been critical of his dear friend, brother Robert Taylor, for speaking on that lectureship annually. Now, however, brother Bobby Liddell, recently named the new Director of MSOP, is scheduled to speak on the 2007 ETSOP Lectureship, in spite of the fact that the reputation for doctrinal soundness of this school has declined rather than improved in recent years.

Yet another case in point is that brother Cates, in a conversation with me in February 2005, was very critical of GBN and even of the elders of the Forest Hill Congregation, Memphis, TN (his home congregation and home of MSOP), for spending so much money on equipment in preparation for

broadcasting over GBN. He told me they would not be permitted to make an appeal for money at the 2005 lectureship. He applauded my letter to brother Barry Gilreath, Sr., Executive Director of GBN (and an elder of the Highland Church, Dalton, GA), in which I related why we could not publish a full-page ad in the March 2005 edition of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*, of which I was Editor at the time. A principal reason for rejecting the ad was GBN's plan to use Apologetics Press staffers (among whom was Dave Miller) in its programming. Cates also expressed his lack of respect for brother Jim Dearman, Program Director for GBN, because of problems relating to him while he was a teacher at MSOP several years ago. Now, however, brother Cates seems to pretend that he never spoke such words or entertained such attitudes as MSOP and Forest Hill have obviously fully embraced GBN. The common element in these three instances is relentless determination to support Apologetics Press and therefore Dave Miller. Many, many other such strange fellowship realignments have taken place since mid-2005. These involve, among others, Southwest School of Bible Studies (Austin, TX), Online Academy of Bible Studies (Dyersburg, TN), and Florida School of Preaching (Lakeland, FL). Among others, these also involve congregations that formerly hosted Scripturally sound lectureships, such as Schertz Church of Christ, Schertz, TX, Southside Church of Christ, Lubbock, TX, Shenandoah Church of Christ, San Antonio, TX, and West Visalia Church of Christ, Visalia, CA. (Note: The foregoing list does not include such congregations as Getwell Church of Christ, Memphis, TN and East Hill Church of Christ, Pulaski, TN, which has employed the services of brother Miller in their programs for several years prior to 2005.)

20. See my article, "The Sudden and Curious Emphasis on 'Balance'," *Contending for the Faith* November–December 2005, pp. 23–27.

[NOTE: This MS was written for the 2007 *Contending for the Faith Spring Church of Christ Lectureship*. It was published in the lectureship book, *Fellowship—From God or Man?*]