

THE TREATMENT OF BRETHREN

Christians need to study this subject that they might better understand their relationship to one another. There are many passages that teach us how we are to treat one another. It is only when this knowledge is acquired and applied that we become to our brethren as "rivers of water in a dry place", and as the "shadow of a great rock in a weary land".

The brother overtaken in a fault in Galations 6:1 is not an impenitent brother who has become a habitual sinner, but one who has been surprised by temptation and has fallen. The spiritual are to restore such a one. This is to be done in the spirit of meekness -- with an understanding heart. We are to be tender while we are firm, and prayerful while we rebuke. The man who is firm in his stand for the truth, and yet deals kindly and gently with his fallen brother, is a great asset to the church.

The brother who is in error, as we have the record in James 5: 19 - 20, must be helped. We need to realize that there are many in error who are in need of our help. Some of these brethren are in error because of ignorance, and can be recovered with teaching -- if the one doing the teaching has the right attitude in his approach. This is what Paul told Timothy in II Tim. 2: 24 - 26, "*And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.*" We do not treat brethren who are ignorantly in error as we do a brother who is aware of his error and has become hardened in his course of action. The hardened brother cannot be reached with gentle teaching, he must be rebuked sharply (Tit. 1: 9 - 13; Tit. 3:10; II Tim. 4:2).

The brother who is a false teacher, as we have the record in Rom. 16: 17 - 18, must be dealt with quickly. He must be marked and avoided. His hardened attitude and teaching of error makes him very dangerous to the welfare of God's people. He must be publicly exposed.

The impenitent brother, as we have the record in I Cor. 5, must be withdrawn from. There is no place in the fellowship of the saints for the erring brother who cannot be brought to repentance.

Brethren, I fear that many times we have had but one way and one approach in dealing with those in error. We have failed to take all circumstances into consideration, and our dealing with a brother who is in error ignorantly we have many times treated him as though he were a hardened false teacher. In so doing, we simply drove him further into sin! Brethren who are overtaken in a fault and those who are weak spiritually cannot be treated as we would an impenitent reprobate.

(Note: I wrote this article in 1965 from notes I had taken from an article written years before by brother Walter Henderson who is now deceased. I believe the article is as timely today as it was when it was first written.)

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