

The Left Foot Of Fellowship: The Modern Church's Response To Biblical Correction



**“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face,
because he was to be blamed.”**

Galatians 2:11

Pastors Beware!

You may think it is a good thing to kick people out of your church whom you and others consider divisive, but beware, lest you expel a concerned messenger like “Nathan the prophet” whom God may have sent your way – precisely to warn you of some spiritual danger that you are ignorant of or oblivious to.

Many pastors nowadays pride themselves in being good shepherds of the flock, by ousting “trouble-makers”, but I can say from the point of a man considered a “trouble-maker” in the typical church nowadays, that many a pastor needs rebuke and correction, just as Peter “was to be blamed” and needed to be corrected publicly by the apostle Paul at one point in time. Paul’s response to error (an unbiblical practice in the case of Peter) is the kind of response in the church that keeps error from getting out of control. It is a good thing, not a bad thing. But today, the tide has reversed and the attitude in most churches is that we should not speak out against sin or against error because we might offend someone. Those who dare to correct error are often accused of being legalistic or divisive when in fact they are being obedient to God who commanded his children to follow this approach to sin in the congregation (including when someone in leadership is the guilty party):

“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, **rebuke him**; and if he repent, forgive him.” [Luke 17:3]

“Them that sin **rebuke before all**, that others also may fear.” [1 Timothy 5:20]

When was the last time you heard a pastor tell his congregation to rebuke him if he preached something wrong?

Time for some clarification on sin and biblical error

Many will probably complain that sin and biblical error should not be used interchangeably, especially regarding the passages in Luke 17 and 1 Timothy 5 discussed above. However, if someone lies about the meaning of a verse in the bible, even if they do it in ignorance, isn’t it still a lie? Isn’t it still to be corrected? For example, let’s say a pastor asks one of his elders to preach

and that elder preaches on John 14:6 (“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”) and then tells the congregation that John 14:6 does not mean what it says and that there are still many ways to heaven. Isn’t the act of telling that lie about John 14:6 a sin? Don’t you think the pastor should correct that elder’s comments on-the-spot in front of everyone, so that all the hearers of the lie will also hear the correction AND will also see biblical correction being practiced properly? And what if the pastor fails to correct that elder? Should everyone else who knows a big lie was told just bite their tongues?

Now let’s take a look at Romans 16:17

So what was Paul talking about in Romans 16:17:

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences **contrary to the doctrine** which ye have learned; and avoid them.”

Well, as John Gill notes in the following paragraph he was referring to that which was ***contrary to the doctrine of the Scriptures***.

“The apostle being about to finish his epistle, and recollecting that he had not given this church any instructions about the false teachers, who had been the cause of all their differences and uneasiness, inserts them here.” The men that Paul is referring to here were those who were teaching things “contrary to the doctrine of the Scriptures, of Christ and his apostles, and which they had learned from them; such as justification by the works of the law, the observance of Jewish days, and abstinence from meats, enjoined by the ceremonial law, and that as necessary to salvation” ... “by these men they were divided in sentiments, affection, and worship” ... “the apostle advises to “mark” such persons, look out for, narrowly watch, strictly observe, and diligently examine them” ... “take notice of such who are busy to spread false doctrine.” ... “watch their motions, follow them closely, take them to an account, examine their principles according to the word of God; and if found to be contrary thereunto, note them as false teachers” ... “shun their ministry, drop attendance on it, depart far from them, have no private conversation with them, receive them not into their houses, nor bid them God speed; with such do not eat, have no communion with them at the Lord’s table, withdraw from them as disorderly persons, who act contrary to the doctrine and order of the Gospel, and after proper admonition reject them from all fellowship with you.”

Jesus spoke out against sin. John the Baptist spoke out against sin. Paul spoke out against sin. All the Old Testament prophets spoke out against sin. Speaking out about sin and error is the way that God intended his sheep to keep the Church pure. Similarly, if a parent ignored or continually overlooked the disobedience of their children, it would be a sign that they hate their

children: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." [Proverbs 13:24] Error that is preached publicly should be corrected publicly but there are times when correction in private is more appropriate.

Because of their fear of correction, you won't find too many church leaders urging their members to "test the spirits" [1John 4:1], "prove all things" [1Thes 5:21] and "earnestly contend for the faith" [Jude 1:3] especially when the leadership are off base. Churches that don't care about biblical truth tend to focus more on stifling the kind of interaction that might result in members questioning their pastors. They stifle correction by avoiding interactive Sunday school classes and by teaching about how bad division is (their version of division - don't make any waves for the leadership) and how good unity is (their version of unity - unity where truth is secondary).

Division amongst true believers happens but it is not necessarily a bad thing, it just depends on what the division is about and how the believers deal with the situation. Believers should be committed to working out disagreements by studying doctrine **to be sure that all are in harmony with scripture. We should always strive to be in harmony with the will of God by seeking to be in agreement with God's word.** We must remember that unity at the expense of truth is an act of treason against God and His word. Those who take pride in unity and avoiding confrontation *while sacrificing truth* are no friend of God.

It seems that there are quite a number of pastors who know lots about the latest and greatest "Christian" books and speakers, yet know little about solid biblical doctrine concerning major tenets of the faith like the sovereignty of God, the nature and lostness of man, the scope of Christ's atonement, what is wrong with many modern bible versions and how to identify false teachers and preachers. Rather than being able to weed out the bad teachers, bad doctrine, bad bibles and bad books, most pastors seem to be embracing the very things that they as shepherds should be rejecting and should be warning their flocks about. And they are rejecting the doctrines they should be studying and teaching. Many of these pastors are giving the "left foot of fellowship to" (kicking out) the very people who are bringing them truth and loving correction. What perilous times we as believers live in!

"Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?"

Galatians 4:16

See also:

The Need Of the Hour - To Contend Earnestly

Warnings About Ecumenism

False Doctrines In Christianity Today

Legalistic Or Antiseptic
