Pillars of the Truth

Article #2

*A Truly Strong Church*

Garland Elkins

**An Often Disregarded, Yet Necessary Requirement**

**For A Strong Church**

**DEFENDING THE FAITH**

When false teachers arise teaching doctrines that disturb and divide the brethren, what should the church do? Doubtless, we should do what Jesus and his faithful followers did. They opposed error (I Pet. 2:21; Mat. 15:9; 7:51-60; Gal. 2:4-5). Such action will either slow down, or in many instances, kill error. If it were to don either of these, a strong church, as individual members, must oppose error in order to be free from the blood of others (Acts 20:26-32).

It seems that, at the very time when the church has every right to expect peace and prosperity, the devil stirs up hardships, errors, persecutions and unfair treatment. This is not surprising (I Pet. 5:8;II Cor. 2:11; 11:3).

When some religious person is brought face to face with the Truth of Christ, and is made to know that he is wrong in his teaching and/or practice, there are two things he may do: either surrender his error and obey God, or yield to Satan and fight, and otherwise act ugly against the Truth. Unfortunately, it is sad but true that the latter course is often chosen.

The Lord wrote letters to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1:11).What He commended in those churches is what He would commend in His churches today. Our Lord commended various churches for defending the Truth and opposing error. Though other things may have been condemned by the Lord, in every instance He complimented the various churches for opposing error. Our Lord also commended the church at Ephesus for opposing corrupt deeds or works such as fornication and idolatry (Rev. 2:6).

The church at Thyatira was blamed (Rev. 2:20-23) for tolerating the world in the church. They possessed many graces, but they were deficient in an important one, courage (I Cor. 5:1; Rev. 2:14).We cannot please God merely by leaving evil alone. We must actively oppose it. Space does not permit a detailed study of the seven churches of Asia, but it would be profitable.

It would be ideal if no error were ever taught. Then, there would be no need to oppose error--due to the fact only the Truth was taught. Doubtless, such a situation would please all who love the Lord. It is indeed nothing short of pathetic and shameful that not all will teach the Truth.

Who is responsible for the error that hinders the cause of Christ, and that divides into parties and factions? We can easily answer this question by ascertaining who teaches error. The fault lies not with those who teach the Truth, and who are open in their opposition to false doctrines. The responsibility rests squarely upon the shoulders of those who teach error.

We are not ignorant of Satan’s devices (II Cor. 2:11). It is always the claim of innovators and leaders of all kinds of divisive doctrines that it was not their teaching that caused division. It is their incredible contention that it was the opposition to their error that was responsible for the division! Discerning persons should be able to see: (1) Their false teaching is the direct cause of trouble. (2) Our opposition to their error is our immediate reaction. (3) The inevitable result of their error will be division. (4) Eternal punishment will be the final reward to all unrepentant false teachers (II Jno. 9-11; Gal. 1:8-9; Rev. 22:18-19). What should the church do when it learns that false teaching is being done? In a proper Christian attitude, the church should seek to prevail upon such teachers to cease their false teaching (Mat. 22:1-46; 15:1-20; I Pet. 2:21; Phil. 2:5; Gal. 2:4-5; Rom. 16:17-18). False teachers could quickly stop false doctrine by ceasing to teach error. This would cause all faithful Christians to rejoice.

If this is not done, preachers, elders and the entire church have only one course open, and that is to defend the Truth and oppose false teaching. Most false teachers adopt a martyrdom stance. Having originated their erroneous teaching, they then insist that it be accepted. When faithful brethren oppose them, they cry “foul” even though they may be meddlers in other men’s matters (I Pet. 4:15-16). They seek to convince all of their teaching and insist that they be not opposed. This writer has found this to be true of almost every person whose teaching has disturbed the church. Let it be stated again that it is not only a privilege, but also the duty of all Christians to oppose error with all of their might--even though it may be, in some cases, that some such teachers are among our closest friends and nearest relatives (Gal. 1:10; Mat. 10:34-39).

There is no greater curse to the souls of men than error. It keeps honest people out of the church. It will retard the growth of the church and even divide the body of Christ. False doctrine is sin, and sin will cause souls to be lost in hell (Psa. 9:17; Mark 9:44). Because we love the souls of men, we are obligated to do all we possibly can to save the lost (Acts 2:22-40; Jas. 5:19-20). Thus, a strong church will defend the faith. GO