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by

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SINFUL SEPARATISM:

Satan's Vicious Device to Destroy the Unity of the Spirit among True Brethren

Introduction — When the devil tempted Jesus with a temptation which was outwardly appealing (Matthew 4:3) because the Savior was hungry (v. 2), how did Jesus respond to this temptation? He simply said: ***“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”*** (v. 4). When the devil tempted Jesus with another temptation which was deceitfully deceptive because he used the *“sheep’s clothing”* (Matthew 7:15) of quoting from Psalm 91 (Matthew 4:6), how did Jesus respond to this second temptation? He once again simply said: ***“It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God”*** (v. 7). When the devil tempted Jesus with a third temptation which was built on an outlandish lie (vv. 8-9), how did Jesus respond to this third temptation? He especially showed His holy zeal in His

divinely-appointed office as the Savior for the world (I Timothy 1:15) when He said: “*Get thee hence, Satan, for **it is written**, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve*” (Matthew 4:10). So, in this convention essay, strengthened and emboldened by the rich, changeless, and saving grace of God in Christ Jesus (II Corinthians 8:9; Hebrews 13:8; Titus 2:11), we will use “***It is written***” to expose, warn against, and reject the outwardly appealing, the deceitfully deceptive, and the outlandish lie of

SINFUL SEPARATISM:

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Part I: Why sound doctrine and the practice of such doctrine are essential at all times, especially in these latter days!

The Apostle Paul, “*moved by the Holy Ghost*” (II Peter 1:21), reminded Timothy and each of us of one of the qualifications for the divinely-instituted pastoral office in these words from Titus 1: “*Holding fast the faithful Word as he [the pastor, the overseer of souls] hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers*” (v. 9). What is “*sound doctrine*”? It is the teaching which is pure, uncorrupted, and untainted. What is the source, the “*well*” from which this “*sound doctrine*” flows and originates? It flows and originates from no other source than the true, trustworthy, sure, certain, and faithful Word of God, the written-down Scriptures, the revealed Word of God. We are urged and exhorted in Titus 1 to keep on holding firmly to, to keep on clinging to, to keep on adhering to, and to keep on being devoted to this “*faithful Word*” (Titus 1:9a) of God, this “*sound doctrine*” of the Holy Scriptures.

We are never to stop supporting this “*faithful Word,*” this “*sound doctrine,*” especially when our faithful pastors call out with this Word of truth to the precious souls of their “*flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made [them] overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood*” (Acts 20:28). Furthermore, we are never to stop defending the pure doctrine of God’s Word, especially when our pastors faithfully teach and preach that uncorrupted doctrine to the members of their congregation, when our pastors use that untainted doctrine of the Holy Scriptures to entreat and implore the blood-bought souls of their flock, and when our pastors seek to persuade and when they lead the lambs and sheep under their care with the “*sound doctrine*” of the revealed Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments, “*the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone*” (Ephesians 2:20).

The faithful pastor is also to use the “*sound doctrine*” of the written-down Word of God “*to convince the gainsayers,*” that is, to keep on exposing, to keep on rebuking, and to keep on convicting those who continue to speak against, continue to contradict, continue to deny, and continue to oppose God’s faithful Word, the Holy Scriptures. We should not hesitate to stand up for and speak up for our pastors when they, with “*sound doctrine,*” expose, rebuke, and convict those who rise up in rebellion, like Korah in Numbers 16, against the true God, against His written-down, revealed Word of truth, and against His faithful servants, His faithful mouthpieces (I Peter 4:11).

The sound doctrine of the Holy Scriptures is no small and insignificant thing; it is spoken of again and again as something important and precious in our God’s kingdom of grace, in His visible church here on earth. Let us consider the inspired words of God written down by the Apostle Paul to Timothy in I Timothy 4: “*Take heed unto thyself and unto **the doctrine**; continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee*” (v. 16). Here we see that this sound, uncorrupted doctrine is inseparably connected with the salvation of the pastor’s own soul, as well as being inseparably connected with the salvation of the souls of his flock. Let us also examine the God-breathed gems of truth in II Timothy 3 which likewise confirm the great significance of sound, untainted doctrine: “*And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable **for doctrine,***

for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (vv. 15-16). What was Timothy reminded of in II Timothy 4: “*Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (v. 2). The Lord God Himself left no doubt about the vital importance of **sound** doctrine when in Jeremiah 23 He announced: “*He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully*” (v. 28b). Let us not forget that this sound doctrine is never to be anything more or anything less than that revealed by God the Holy Ghost (II Peter 1:21) in the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and in the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Our dear and only Savior, Christ Jesus, in the last chapter of the Holy Scriptures, issued two very strong, very clear, and very much needed warnings when He said: “*I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall **add unto** these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall **take away from** the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book*” (Revelation 22:18-19).

Yes, we can draw the right and certain conclusion that sound doctrine from God’s faithful Word (Titus 1:9) is not to be sneered at and scoffed at (II Peter 3:3) by anyone’s words or by anyone’s actions. At the same time, what is to follow the sound doctrine of God’s faithful Word, that is, sound practice, the consistent application of that sound doctrine from the faithful Word of God, is likewise not to be sneered at and scoffed at by anyone’s words or by anyone’s actions. Therefore, sound doctrine and sound practice are to go hand-in-hand; sound doctrine leading the way, and sound practice following in the footsteps of the sound, uncorrupted, and untainted doctrine grounded in and built on God’s faithful, revealed, and written-down words in the Holy Scriptures. The Apostle James pinpoints the importance of the consistent application of sound doctrine when we are bluntly told: “*Be ye **doers of the Word** and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves*” (James 1:22). Jesus declared in John 10: “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they **follow Me***” (v. 27). The putting of sound doctrine into God-pleasing, consistent application is summed up so concisely in II Corinthians 13, where the Apostle Paul confessed these words, written down by inspiration of the Holy Ghost: “*We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth*” (v. 8).

Why should we, “*a very small remnant*” (Isaiah 1:9) in these latter days (all by God’s “*grace,*” I Corinthians 15:10), be “*zealous*” (Titus 2:14) for the sound doctrine from God’s faithful Word and, furthermore, be “*zealous*” for the sound practice built on and produced by that sound doctrine? Oh, we, who, once again by God’s “*grace*” (Ephesians 2:5, 7-8), “*are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people*” (I Peter 2:9), could answer this question in many different ways; but, in the end, there is only one answer: The redemption of Christ Jesus for us, His perfect obedience of God’s Holy Law as our Substitute before God, and His perfect, sinless suffering and death as the once-for-all propitiation, payment, and ransom paid to God in our behalf, so that now all mankind are declared justified, forgiven, and righteous before God; and by faith in this redemption of Christ Jesus, we appropriate, for our very own, full justification before God, free and finished forgiveness for all of our sins, and perfect righteousness before God (Colossians 1:21-22). We can give this glorious answer because of the following jewels written down in God’s Word: “*All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being **justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness, that He might be just and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what Law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law*” (Romans 3:23-28). “*Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the Law to do them. ... **Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law**, being made a curse for us, for it is written: Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree” (Galatians 3:10 and 13). “*When the fullness of the time was come, **God sent forth His Son**, made of a woman, made under the Law, **to redeem them that were under the Law**, that we might receive the adoption of sons*” (Galatians 4:4-5). “*The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose**

again. ... **God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them**, and hath committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation. ... For He hath made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (II Corinthians 5:14-15, 19, 21 — The last verse, 21, is translated according to the order of words in the Greek text). “You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ... and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. For **by grace are ye saved through faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:1, 3b-10). These priceless words of the Holy Ghost remind us as to what motivates, what moves, and what impels us, the sheep of our good Shepherd, to be zealous for the sound doctrine of God’s faithful Word and, furthermore, be zealous for the consistent application of that sound doctrine.

What are some of the fruits of such zeal for the pure, untainted, uncorrupted, and sound doctrine from God’s true, faithful, and everlasting Word of Truth, and, furthermore, what are some of the fruits of such zeal for the practice, the consistent application of such sound doctrine in our daily lives during these latter, evil days, fruits which we will focus on in this essay?

1. One of the fruits of such Godly zeal is to bow to the sound doctrine of Scriptural separation and the practice, the consistent application of such in our individual lives, in our congregations, and in our Conference, ever remembering the instruction of St. Paul in II Corinthians 10: “Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and **bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ**” (v. 5), as well as the confession of Simon Peter to Jesus in Luke 5: “Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing; **nevertheless at Thy Word I will let down the net**” (v. 5).

2. Another fruit of such God-pleasing zeal for sound doctrine and practice is to reject and to abhor sinful separatism and consistently apply such rejection and abhorrence in our individual lives, in our congregations, and in our Conference, ever remembering the instruction of Paul in Romans 12, “**Abhor that which is evil**” (v. 9a), as well as the confession of the psalmist in Psalm 119: “Through Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore **I hate every false way**” (v. 104).

3. A third fruit of such holy zeal for sound doctrine and the consistent application of such doctrine is to take careful note of and learn from the disastrous, horrible, and offensive consequences of such sinful separatism, ever remembering the warning, the instruction, and the appeal of the Lord in Hebrews 3: “Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear His voice, **harden not your hearts**, as in the provocation in the day of temptation in the wilderness, when your fathers tempted Me, proved Me, and saw My works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said: They do always err in their heart, and they have not known My ways. So I swear in My wrath: They shall not enter into My rest,) **take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God**, but exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” (vv. 7-14).

4. A final fruit of Scripture-produced zeal for sound doctrine and practice is to know and to use the spiritual equipment which our gracious God has given to us for successful warfare against the seductive, Satanic, and fleshly allurements of sinful separatism (II Corinthians 11:13-14), ever remembering the priceless instruction and the much-needed encouragement found in Ephesians 6: “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. **Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil**. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore **take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done**

all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with **truth**, and having on the breastplate of **righteousness**, and your feet shod with the preparation of the **Gospel of peace**; above all, taking the shield of **faith**, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of **salvation**, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the **Word of God**" (vv. 10-17).

By the grace of God (I Corinthians 15:10), we have shown you, in the first part of this essay, why sound doctrine and the consistent application of such doctrine are essential at all times, especially in these latter days. Now, in the second part of this essay, we will, by the grace of God, take up one aspect of sound doctrine and the practice of such, that is:

Part II: What is Scriptural, God-pleasing separation, and why it is so important to teach and practice it, especially in these latter days!

Because of the disaster of sin infiltrating the world, brought about when Adam and Eve believed and followed the lies of the devil rather than believing and following the words of their gracious God and Creator (Genesis 3:4-6; 2:16-17), the many fruits of sin continue to be a terrible plague in this world. Some of the fruits of this original or inherited sin are "*heresies*" (Galatians 5:20), that is, man-produced nonsense (I Timothy 6:4 - "*knowing nothing*") which fights against the God-inspired teachings of the Holy Scriptures (II Timothy 3:16). These heresies have produced and keep on producing many ungodly, sinful factions and "*divisions*" (Romans 16:17a) in the visible church.

Such heresies are promoted, spread, and supported by "*heretic[s]*" (Titus 3:10), that is, by "*false [lying, pseudo] prophets*" (Matthew 7:15; 24:11a), who with their heresies, their lies, "*deceive many*" (24:11b), just as the devil deceived Adam and Eve with his lies: "**Ye shall not surely die, for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof [from the forbidden tree – Genesis 2:17], then your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil**" (Genesis 3:4b-5). Let no one say that such heresies and such heretics are a small, minor problem. The Holy Ghost says otherwise in Galatians 5, where we are told that "*a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*" (v. 9). A small heresy or a little false doctrine, if left alone, will infect and corrupt the whole body of sound, Scripture doctrine! Let us not forget about the powerful truths set forth in II Timothy 2: "*Shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker, of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some*" (vv. 16-18).

Now, let us review how we determine what is a heresy, what is a false teaching, what is a heretic, and what is a false teacher. The method is always the same: **1.** Establish what is the clear, revealed teaching of God's Word (II Timothy 1:13; Titus 2:1, 7-8). **2.** If a teaching is contrary to and different from this clear, revealed teaching of God's Word, then it is false, counterfeit, unsound, erroneous, and a lie (I Timothy 6:3-5; Romans 16:17-18). Also, if a teacher, pastor, or professor teaches contrary to and different from the clear, revealed teaching of God's Word, that person is a false, counterfeit, unsound, erroneous, and lying teacher. The psalmist sets forth this method in Psalm 119, when he says: "*Through Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path*" (vv. 104-105). To illustrate this method, we unashamedly declare that the clear, revealed teaching in Genesis 1 and 2 establishes the truth that God marvelously created everything in the sky and here on earth by His almighty Word in six, normal twenty-four hour days. Any teaching contrary to and different from this clear, revealed teaching in the first two chapters of Genesis is a false, counterfeit, unsound, and erroneous teaching; it is a lie taught by a lying teacher. Such a false teaching and such a false teacher are not to be listened to, followed, or supported, but are to be rejected, avoided, and separated from.

In other words, the Word of God calls on the followers of Jesus to **take action** against persistent false teachings and impenitent false teachers who continue to teach, to confess, and to support what is contrary to and different from God's Word of truth. Let us listen carefully and take to

heart what our God says and where He stands in regard to teachings which oppose the teaching of His Word and, furthermore, what our God says and where He stands in regard to teachers who teach what is contrary to and different from what He teaches in His Word:

*“Now I beseech you, brethren, **mark them** which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and **avoid them**. For they that are **such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ**, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches **deceive the hearts of the simple**”* (Romans 16:17-18). The Apostle Paul, the Holy Ghost’s writer for this epistle to the Romans, calls out to and appeals to his fellow believers to keep on being on the look-out for those who continuously make and, therefore, continuously bring about divisions (that is, splits and schisms) and offenses (spiritual stumbling blocks) contrary to the doctrine which they had learned. And what action does the Triune God, through the Apostle Paul, say His children are to take concerning these persistent division-causing and these persistently offensive false teachers? He says that His followers, the disciples of Jesus, are to avoid and turn away from such; they are not to continue with them; they are not to remain under their influence. And what three things does the Holy Ghost conclude about these persistent division-causing and offensive false teachers? **1. They do not serve and are not subject to the Lord Jesus Christ.** **2. They serve their own belly**, that is, they keep on serving themselves and their own emotions, their own personal agendas. **3. They keep on deceiving simple, trusting souls** with nice-sounding and enticing words. So, our merciful God, who in Christ Jesus perfectly loves His dear sheep and lambs (I John 4:9-10), not only **warns us against** heterodoxy, that is, persistent false teaching, and heterodox, that is, persistently false teachers; but He also **commands us to separate and turn away from** such heterodoxy, persistently false teaching, and the heterodox, persistently false teachers. [*Orthodox* is what is the same as, straight in line with, the pure, sound, and right teaching or doctrine of God’s Word (Matthew 28:20; Jeremiah 23:28b). *Heterodox* is what is different from, other than the pure, sound, and right teaching or doctrine of God’s Word (I Timothy 6:3 - “teach otherwise”).]

*“If any man **teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words**, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the doctrine which is according to Godliness, he is **proud, knowing nothing**; ...*from such withdraw thyself*”* (I Timothy 6:3-4a, 5c). Once again, the Holy Ghost uses the Apostle Paul as His writer to instruct and remind us of how dangerous teachings are which are different from the teachings of Jesus and all the teachings of His Word and, at the same time, how dangerous are those teachers who keep on not agreeing with and who keep on not going along with the safe, sound, pure, and uncorrupted words of Jesus in His Word. How does the Holy Ghost describe such a heterodox teacher? *“He is proud, knowing nothing.”* In short, the Holy Ghost identified such a heterodox teacher as a conceited, puffed-up fool, a bloated ignoramus. That is why we have the divine command to beware of, to withdraw from, to separate from, and to go away from such a fool, such a dangerous, heterodox teacher who is teaching such dangerous, heterodox teachings. Jesus Himself declared in Matthew 7: *“**Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits**”* (7:15-16a). The Apostle Paul, moved by the Holy Ghost, wrote down these words to the Ephesian pastors: *“I know this, that after my departing **shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock; also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them**”* (Acts 20:29-30).

Our God does not want diversity and differences in doctrine and practice in His church. How can we make such a statement? We can make it because of the clear words from the Holy Ghost, written down by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 1: *“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye **all speak the same thing** [all speak the orthodox doctrine or teaching], and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”* (v. 10). The question of the Prophet Amos is also very timely: *“Can two walk together except they **be agreed?**”* (3:3). We are reminded in Ephesians 4 to conduct ourselves *“with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, **endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**”* (vv. 2-3). Such conduct is one small way for us to show our genuine, sincere love for Him who *“first loved us”* (I John 4:19). Jesus, *“the Lord our righteousness”* (Jeremiah 23:6), our

“Emmanuel” (Matthew 1:23), our “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11a), who laid down His sinless life for us who were lost and condemned sheep by nature (v. 11b; Isaiah 53:6) — it is this Jesus who says to us in John 14: “**If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him**” (v. 23). Out of gratitude and thanks to our dear Savior, “*who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*” (Titus 2:14), we have the great “*opportunity*” (Galatians 6:10) in our individual lives, in the life of our congregations, and in the life of our Conference to show and reveal our love for Him, both in what we say and do, by **willingly separating from** those who persist in teaching, holding to, and supporting teachings which are different from the teachings of God’s Word, ever remembering that “*it is God which worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13). And that “*good pleasure*” of our God includes hearing His Word (Luke 11:28) when it speaks to us about **sinful separatism**.

III. What is sinful separatism and why it is vital to warn against and reject it, especially in these latter days.

What is sinful separatism or sinful separation? This question is best answered by the Holy Ghost speaking through the Apostle John in I John 2: “*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*” (v. 19). Sinful separatism or sinful separation is the carrying out of a public, spiritual divorce from those who, by God’s grace alone, are in the true “*unity of the Spirit*” (Ephesians 4:3), that unity which is “*built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone*” (Ephesians 2:20).

This separatism or separation is **sinful** because it transgresses, disregards, and disobeys “*the Law*” (I John 3:4) of God, clear commands of God such as the following: “*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk [or live] worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 3:1-3). Sinful separatists by their actions, **oppose** God’s command to preserve the unity of the Spirit. The Savior says: “*If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me*” (Matthew 16:24). Sinful separatists defy God’s command by **not** denying themselves, by **not** crucifying their flesh with its “*carnal*” (Romans 8:7) and arrogant desires (I John 2:16). Sinful separatists do **not** follow Christ and His Word of Truth (John 17:17). “*Be thou faithful unto death*” (Revelation 2:10). Sinful separatists do not remain faithful to Christ and to “*It is written*” (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10) because the very essence of sinful separatism is **unfaithfulness**. “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33). Sinful separatists do the **opposite** of what Jesus teaches in Matthew 6; they seek first what **they** want according to their own sinful opinions, feelings, and emotions. Sinful separatism is rebellion and rejection of the Law of God as the only standard of how Christians are to live and not to live; what they are to do and not to do. Such sinful separatism **replaces** the standard of God’s Law with other standards such as self or “me,” human feelings, human opinions, and human emotions. In John 6, when certain disciples of Jesus heard Him teach, they said: “*This is an hard saying; who can hear it?*” (v. 60). These disciples also “*murmured*” (v. 61a) and complained about Jesus’ teaching. Despite the Savior’s question to them, “*Doth this offend you?*” (v. 61b), it is reported that “*from that time many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him*” (v. 66). These disciples were guilty of **sinful separatism**, of sinfully separating themselves from Jesus, from His true teaching, and from the other disciples who were following Jesus.

Sinful separatism is not only an abuse of God’s Law, but it is also **an abuse of the Gospel of Christ**. The Gospel of Christ tells us the “*good tidings of great joy*” (Luke 2:10) that “*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us; for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree’*” (Galatians 3:13). Does this Gospel then provide the license to “*continue in sin that grace may abound*” (Romans 6:1)? The answer to this question is a

resounding “*God forbid! How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?*” (v. 2). The Apostle Paul in II Corinthians 5 teaches us that Christ Jesus “*died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again. ... Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*” (vv. 15 and 17). If someone participates in and supports sinful separatism and, at the same time, professes to know, believe in, and follow Jesus, that person is a **liar**; for Jesus Himself declared to His mouthpieces and messengers in Luke 10: “*He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me, and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me*” (v. 16).

Sinful separatism is **loveless**; it is the **opposite** of the agape [ah • GAH • pay] love, self-sacrificial love, with its characteristics spelled out in I Corinthians 13: “*Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, ...thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth*” (vv. 5-6). The lovelessness of sinful separatism is illustrated so shockingly in Psalm 41, where this testimony is given: “*Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel **against me***” (v. 9). Even our dear Savior experienced the lovelessness of sinful separatism from his friend and, at the same time, one of His twelve apostles, as described in Matthew 26: “*Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests and said unto them, ‘What will ye give me and I will deliver Him unto you?’ And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to **betray Him***” (vv. 14-16). Later on in Matthew 26, we have a further report on the **vener** of Judas’ loveless sinful separatism and how Jesus responded to it: “*And while He yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came and with him a great multitude with swords and staves from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed Him gave them a sign, saying: ‘Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He; hold Him fast.’ And forthwith he came to Jesus and said: ‘Hail, Master,’ and kissed Him. And Jesus said unto him: ‘Friend, wherefore art thou come?’” (vv. 47-50a). Luke, in his Gospel, “*moved by the Holy Ghost*” (II Peter 1:21), wrote down this probing and piercing question from Jesus to Judas: “*Judas, **betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?***” (22:48).*

The action of sinful separatism is the **opposite** of the action which Christians, according to their New Man (Ephesians 4:24), are to remember and to carry out in their daily lives: “*By love serve one another*” (Galatians 5:13). My dear brethren, let us take the sure words of truth in I John 3 and compare them with the definition of **sinful separatism** in I John 2. First of all, let us listen carefully to the message of John in chapter 3: “*We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. ... Hereby perceive we the love of God, because **He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.** ... My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth*” (vv. 14, 16, and 18). Now take these words and compare them with the description of loveless sinful separatism in chapter 2: “*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*” (v. 19). I John 3:14, 16 and 18 lays before us the fruits of the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace, while I John 2:19 shows us the fruits of the devil’s lies, the influence of the ungodly world, and the works of the wicked flesh.

Sinful separatism is also **idolatrous** when it places friends, relatives, family, money, job, or anything else as **more important** than the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and **more important** than the sound doctrine and practice of His Holy Word. Our God says to us and to all: “*Thou shalt have no other gods **before Me***” (Exodus 20:3). The “*Good Shepherd*,” Christ Jesus, who willingly laid down “*His life for the sheep*” (John 10:11) to redeem them (Galatians 3:13) and to save them from everlasting condemnation (John 3:17, 18a; Romans 8:1), shows His great and perfect concern and care for His dear sheep when He “*pulls no punches*” in the following instruction to them: “*Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against*

*his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother **more than Me** is not worthy of Me, and he that loveth son or daughter **more than Me** is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross and **followeth after Me** is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that **loseth his life for My sake** [**"and the Gospel's"** – Mark 8:35] shall find it" (Matthew 10:32-39).*

Why is it vital that we warn against sinful separatism and reject it, especially in these latter days? **First of all**, this is vital because the time may come when we are tempted sinfully to separate from our respective orthodox congregations. Therefore, it is so necessary to review the Scriptural truths in this essay again and again so that the Holy Ghost, through what we have been taught from the Word of God in the past, may bring to our "*remembrance*" (John 14:26b) those truths from God's Word, just as "*Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him: 'Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice.' And when he thought thereon, he wept*" (Mark 14:72). **Secondly**, it is vital that we warn against sinful separatism and reject it, especially in these latter days, knowing that our "adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour, *whom* [we should] *resist steadfast in the faith*" (I Peter 5:8-9a), faith in Jesus, faith in Jesus' completed, finished, and free vicarious satisfaction (I John 2:2) which completely satisfied God's justice in our behalf (Romans 5:19; II Corinthians 5:21), and faith in the accomplished, the total, and the everlasting victory over the devil and hell, over death and the grave, and over sin and the curse of the Law "*through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, [on account of that victory], be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord*" (I Corinthians 15:57-58; see also vv. 55-56).

Now, in the fourth part of our essay, we will focus on

Part IV: The disastrous consequences of sinful separatism for the separatists themselves, for their brethren left behind, and for the church-at-large!

For the sinful separatists themselves, if they remain impenitent in their sin, the consequences of their sinful separatism are not only disastrous for them in this world, but will be everlastingly disastrous for them if they are still impenitent at their death or at the second visible coming of our Savior. "*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*" (Luke 13:3 and 5). The Word of God is crystal clear concerning the dreadful consequences of persistence in sin. Hebrews 10:26 leaves no doubt about its message when it says: "*If we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.*" Those who continue to sin after "*receiving*" (that is, acknowledging, understanding and apprehending) the knowledge of the truth from God's Word cut themselves off from Jesus' sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins and make it of none effect for their salvation.

In his first epistle, the Apostle John, marvelously "*moved by the Holy Ghost*" (II Peter 1:21), repeats the truth which we just considered from Hebrews 10 in regard to persistence in sin. Let us hear and take to heart his words: "*He that committeth sin is of the devil* [the person who keeps on sinning, without any repentance, is the devil's own], *for the devil sinneth from the beginning*" (v. 8). A never-changing, persistent attribute of the devil is that he has continuously kept on sinning since the beginning of the world. For the urgent warning and conviction of the persistent sinful separatist, God, the Holy Ghost, through these words of truth, speaks about the disastrous consequences of continuing in sinful separatism. I urge you, if you personally know a persistent sinful separatist, to send this essay to him, whether he is an enemy, a friend, or a relative. This is one way in which the Holy Ghost, through His written words, can work on that person's heart and soul, bringing him to humble contrition and creating in him anew saving faith in his Redeemer.

If there are children involved with the sinful separatist, whom he takes with him in his ungodly separatism, therein lies another far-reaching spiritual consequence of giving offense to the children by the deceitful words and the wicked, evil actions inseparably tied to sinful separatism. Jesus, in Matthew 18, gives clear instruction concerning such a situation when He says: "*Whoso*

shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offenses, for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh” (vv. 6-7). In these clear words, we see the Savior’s deep and great love for the little ones who believe in Him and in His work as their only Savior! At the same time, we also see the Savior’s outrage when the little ones are *offended*, that is, when anything is done to undermine and destroy their faith, by the evil words and the evil actions of those who have authority over them (Ephesians 6:4).

We need to be reminded to pray to our gracious God that, through the faithful instruction from His Word which the sinful separatists “*received*” (Hebrews 10:26) **before** or **during** their wicked departure, they may be brought to genuine repentance, restored to saving faith in the Savior and His “*ransom for all*” (I Timothy 2:6), and then, by the grace of God in Christ, “*bring forth...fruits worthy of repentance*” (Luke 3:8). Our Savior instructs us to “*pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you*” (Matthew 5:44c). The Lord’s exhortation to His believers in Hebrews chapter 4 is especially timely and instructive: “*Seeing then that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession, for we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (vv. 14-16). The “*time of need*” is that precious time **right now** for sinful separatists to “*repent*” of their offensive, wicked, and sinful conduct and to “*believe the Gospel*” (Mark 1:15b) for the salvation of their souls from their sins. It is most certainly true at all times that the Lord is “*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*” (II Peter 3:9).

When there is a case or cases of sinful separatism, there may be disastrous consequences for former brethren left behind. One could compare it to the aftermath that may follow a malicious desertion in marriage. One of the consequences for brethren left behind may be that some of the weak ones in the local congregation may give credence to vicious gossip concerning the faithfulness of their pastor and may foster in their hearts doubts about the orthodoxy of the congregation and the genuineness of the brethren who stayed the course and remained in the fellowship. If these doubts are not addressed, repented of, and removed, those weak ones may actually be drawn to follow in the footsteps of the sinful separatists who deserted them.

Beyond the orthodox local congregation which was deserted, there may also be spiritual “*tremors*” or “*fall-out*” in the wider fellowship from the offensive action of the sinful separatists. In Matthew 5, Jesus says to His followers: “*Ye are the salt of the earth; but, if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid; neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (vv. 13-16). When the heterodox and unbelievers “*catch wind*” of the action of the sinful separatists, they often take great delight in pointing the finger at us, as if it were all our fault, ridiculing the orthodox congregation which was deserted by the sinful separatists and saying things such as: “*Is this what your sound doctrine and practice produce — dissatisfied souls who run away from your congregation? We’ll find a church home for them; you don’t have to worry!*” All of this brings disrepute on God’s faithful remnant and on God’s faithful, true, and sound doctrine and practice! BUT our faithful, never-changing Savior says to us: “*Remember the Word that I said unto you: The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you*” (John 15:20). And, in addition to those comforting words from our ever-truthful Savior, we have two rock-solid promises: “*We know that **all things work together for good** to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28), and “*Lo, I [Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man] **am with you always, even unto the end of the world***” (Matthew 28:20).

This leads us then into the final part of our essay:

Part V: For the days ahead, words of comfort, encouragement, strength, and help against the devilish, fleshly, and worldly allurements of sinful separatism!

Once again, the words of our God in the Holy Scriptures give us powerful ammunition to wage successful warfare against the horrors and enticements of sinful separatism. Let us be greatly comforted, much encouraged, mightily strengthened, and graciously helped, as the Holy Ghost, through the priceless Word of God, speaks to us these words, worth more than anything and everything in the whole world: *“The Lord is my Light and my Salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the Strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? ...Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord”* (Psalm 27:1 and 14); *“Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness. ...I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee: ‘Fear not, I will help thee’”* (Isaiah 41:10 and 13); *“God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in trouble; therefore will not we fear ...There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High; God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early. ...The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our Refuge”* (Psalm 46:1-2a, 4-5, 7); *“The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. ...Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever”* (Psalm 23:1, 4-6); *“‘But whom say ye that I am?’ And Simon Peter answered and said: ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered and said: ‘Blessed art thou, Simon bar Jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this Rock [Peter’s confession concerning Christ] I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”* (Matthew 16:16-18); *“There hath no temptation [no testing] taken you, but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted [tested] above that ye are able, but will with the temptation [the testing] also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it”* (I Corinthians 10:13); *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity”* (Psalm 133:1); *“I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ...What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: For Thy sake we are killed all the day; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:18, 31-39). My dear brethren, these are some of the mighty spiritual weapons which provide us with strength and help to resist sinful separatism and give us the sure victory over against it, all through the perfect, finished, and free active obedience, suffering, and death of our Redeemer, the God-Man, Christ Jesus, so that now we are redeemed, justified, made righteous, and forgiven, and enjoy all of these treasures by faith in our Emmanuel (II Corinthians 10:4-5; I Corinthians 15:57; John 19:30; Galatians 4:4-5; Romans 3:24; II Corinthians 5:19; Ephesians 2:8-9; Matthew 1:23). ●
