

“For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to battle?” 1 Corinthians 14:8

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“Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls...” Jeremiah 6:16

Sounding Out The Faith

April 2021

“The Two Offices in the Lord’s New Testament Churches” Part #1—Bishop (Pastor, Under-shepherd, Minister)

In today’s ever-changing world, we see Satan’s attack on the Lord’s New Testament churches to compromise God’s Word. It is vital that the Lord’s churches stay true to the teachings of the Scriptures. We must earnestly contend for the faith as Jude 3 admonishes. In this day, compromises concerning the two offices in the Lord’s churches are becoming more and more accepted. There is much confusion about these offices because of going away from the teachings of the Scriptures. I Corinthians 14:33 tells us this confusion is not coming from God. **“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.”**

In this article, we will examine what the Bible teaches concerning the offices of bishop, (pastor, under-shepherd, minister) and deacon. The ordained minister, pastor or bishop, has his work. I Timothy 3:1, **“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.”** Acts 6:4, **“But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”** Likewise, the ordained deacon has his work. Acts 6:1-3, **“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the**

Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” As well as each member of the local body not being ordained, still has their work. Titus 2:1-10, **“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”** As we see in Philippians 1:1, **God has a work for each member and those that hold the office of pastor or deacon. “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:”** Each one in their place and order allows God to do His work through the church by

the Holy Spirit effectively. Ephesians 4:30-32, **“And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”**

We will begin with the office of bishop (pastor, under-shepherd, minister). I Timothy 3:1-7 says, **“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”** This is one place that the Bible clearly lays out the qualifications for the office of bishop.

These are qualifications, not suggestions. Let’s consider these qualifications listed here in Timothy and Titus. Be sure to understand that all of these qualifications are equal and important. However, the situation with marriage, divorce and remarriage while the first wife is still living cannot be changed, so a man would not be

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able to meet that qualification, while the other qualifications could be repented of and remedied. Remember, a marriage covenant is until death. The Bible is clear that divorce and remarriage while the first spouse is still living is adultery because of the breaking of that first marriage covenant. Romans 7:2-3, "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to *her* husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of *her* husband. So then if, while *her* husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man." Matthew 5:31-32, "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."

**Blameless—meaning unaccused, not arrested, without reproach, a legal charge cannot be brought against him*

**Husband of one wife—one, as one in particular, first wife, one woman kind of man, never means one out of many or one as opposed to another*

**Vigilant – sober, of good behavior, temperate, sensible, orderly, self-control*

**Given to hospitality and a lover of good men – hospitable, kind, helpful, charitable disposition, self-sacrifice, piety, having an "open" home and selfless in his duties to the church*

**Apt to teach – having teaching abilities, one who can rightly divide the Word of Truth*

**Not given to wine –not staying near wine, not a drinker*

**No striker – one who strikes back impulsively or seeks revenge, not pugnacious or a smiter*

**Not greedy of filthy lucre – not driven by gain, greed, or covetousness, not putting money above the Lord's work*

**Patient and temperate – forbearing, able to get along with the weaknesses of others*

**Not a brawler, not self-willed and not soon angry – not contentious, gentle, not self-pleasing or arrogant, not irascible or easily angered to sin, in control of one's emotions*

**Not covetous and not given to filthy lucre - not covetous of material gain, not a petty thief*

**One that ruleth well his own house – one that stands forward well in his own household, doesn't "bow" to his wife or children for the sake of "peace"*

**Having his children under subjection and having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly – containing his children in subjection, managing or maintaining control of behaviors*

**With all gravity and sober and just – in seriousness doing the work of the Lord*

**Not a novice, but holding fast the faithful Word with sound doctrine – new convert or unlearned*

****Good report of them without and holy – good witness or testimony of those outside the church by behaving as God would have him***

Let's now consider I Corinthians 1:17-29. "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence." In this passage, we see that God calls a man to the ministry, not to promote himself or to be "above" the people. God calls a man to pastor a church and to lead as a servant of God in the church.

The following Scriptures show us that a bishop (pastor) is simply a superintendent over God's flock. He is an overseer over a congregation. He is a feeder and a shepherd under the Lord. He is an elder.

Acts 20:28 says, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

I Peter 5:1-4 says, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

Hebrews 13: 7 & 17 says, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you."

I Thessalonians 5:12 says, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. *And be at peace among yourselves.*"

II Timothy 4:1-5 warns that there will be times when God's people will not want to hear the plain teaching of the Word of God. However, a pastor must heed to the preaching of the truth no matter how others may feel about it, including himself. As a bishop (pastor, elder) over one of God's New Testament churches, a man must feed the flock of God on what is good for them, the Word of God, and not what they may think they want. "I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and

the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

A pastor must set an example for the church to follow. I Timothy 4:12, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

He must love the church. II Corinthians 11:2, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ."

II Timothy 2:15 shows us that in order for a pastor to "feed" God's flock, he must first be a student and study the Scriptures to be approved of God. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

A bishop then must also be a teacher. I Timothy 4:13-16, "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. 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."

A bishop must be ready to expose error with the Word of God. I Timothy 4:1-7, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself *rather* unto godliness."

He must be a preacher of the Scripture, for the Scripture alone equips a church member to do a work for the Lord. II Timothy 3:16-17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

The office of bishop is a high calling. God has allowed men He has called, that meet His qualifications, to look after and take care of His espoused bride. Ephesians 5:25-27, 32, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Each local church has a pastor that God has placed there to be His messenger to the church. Revelation 1:20, "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches." In Revelation 2 and 3, each letter to the churches begins by addressing the "angel"/messenger/minister of each local church. Acts 20:28 gives the office of bishop as the one to feed the local body. The pastor is the Lord's messenger to the church.

“The Two Offices in the Lord’s New Testament Churches”

Part #2—Deacon

The word deacon means an attendant, waiter at a table or other menial duties. The office of deacon is to help the pastor by doing work that can allow the pastor to remain free to minister to the spiritual needs of the church. Acts 6:1-6, “**And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.**”

Although a deacon is not called by God, his work still needs to be done spiritually. That is why the church was to choose out men who were spiritual and full of wisdom. The qualifications for the office of deacon are just as necessary as the ones for a bishop. They are qualifications and not suggestions. There has been a very sad “tradition” among some of the Lord’s churches today by ordaining “good old boys” to this office instead of those that are qualified. The office of deacon is not one to be given to just anyone. The office of deacon should be used, first of all, when it is needed, as we see in Acts 6. Secondly, the office of deacon should only be used when a man has been set aside by the church that meets the qualifications for the office.

Let’s examine these qualifications in Acts 6:1-6 as listed above and also I Timothy 3:8-13, “**Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.**”

***Honest Report – excellent testimony**

***Full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom – empty of self, completely given over to the Spirit, wise, not impulsive**

***Grave – reverent, honorable, cool headed, solemn, serious**

***Not doubletongued – must be truthful, not double worded, not telling one person one thing and another something else**

***Not given to much wine – not being addicted to, not a drinker, one drink begins to control the mind**

***Not greedy of filthy lucre – not having an uncontrolled desire for money, not driven by money**

***Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience – knowing the true doctrines and being faithful to them**

***Proved – tried, set aside to consider their qualifications**

***Blameless – not accused, not arrested, without reproach, a legal charge cannot be brought against him**

***Their wives must also be grave – reverent, honorable, cool headed, solemn, serious**

***Their wives must not be slanderers – not being a devil, not to be accusers, not saying something bad**

***Their wives must be sober – circumspect, vigilant**

***Their wives must be faithful in all things – trustworthy in all things**

***Husband of one wife - one, as one in particular, first wife, one woman kind of man, never means one out of many or one as opposed to another**

***Ruling his children and houses well – presiding over their household morally**

In these details, we see that God has a definite will in the kind of men that are to serve as deacons. Deacons should serve as “peacemakers” within the church. Remember the purpose in Acts 6 for why they were first ordained in the church? There was trouble in the church, divisions, and schisms. The deacons were to help calm the situation so it did not detract from the work of the pastor. They are to aid and relieve the pastor of certain duties so he can have more time for prayer and study of God’s Word.

A deacon should be setting a Godly example in his dedication to his attendance, visitation, giving, and prayer. He should be setting an example in his deportment. As the qualifications of the deacon indicate, a deacon must be an example in doctrine.

Stephen was one of the first deacons ordained in the church in Jerusalem. He was a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. He was first and foremost, saved by the grace of God. He was a New Testament church member in the Jerusalem church. Stephen was faithful, full of wisdom and power. Acts 6:8-10, “**And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.**” Stephen actually gave his life standing for the truth of God’s Word as a faithful deacon.

A deacon must always remember he is not the “church” boss. A deacon is not in the position of

trying to use the office of pastor as his own personal platform. A deacon is not in the position to “boss” or try to control the pastor. A deacon must not become arrogant in his position. He is to be a man full of wisdom, but he is not the only one with wisdom in the church. He must not become lifted up in pride, forgetting that he is just flesh and blood, fallible, and a sinner. A deacon is not in “charge” of the church’s finances. In the past, some deacons have taken their office and used it for their own personal benefit. That is why there are qualifications for this office.

If a man has opportunity to serve as a deacon in one of the Lord’s New Testament churches, he has a glorious opportunity to serve God as seen in the life of Stephen. The position of deacon can bring great rewards if served faithfully. A faithful deacon will be honored after he has honored the office.

In the Lord’s New Testament churches there is a work for everyone. The Scriptures are clear about the qualifications and duties of a bishop (pastor) and a deacon. Members have their duties as well. God’s way is clear that He is the Head of the Church and the body is made up of many members. Colossians 1:18, “**And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.**” I Corinthians 12:20, “**But now are they many members, yet but one body.**”

God has an order. I Corinthians 12:40, “**Let all things be done decently and in order.**” His order is so that the Lord’s churches can be in unity and harmony. John 17:14-22, “**I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:”**

Colossians 1:4-10, “**Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth: As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit. For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;”**

Spiritual Fornication

Ephesians 5:23-27 says, **“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”** These Scriptures are addressed to the local, New Testament church at Ephesus. All other local, New Testament churches can apply these teachings to themselves as well.

These Scriptures show the relationship between Jesus Christ and His church. Each local body is espoused to Jesus Christ. II Corinthians 11:1-4 says, **“Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.”** This word espoused here means “to joint; to woo”. This is a covenant that was binding between a man and a woman prior to marriage. This showed their devotion to one another before their covenant of marriage that would make them one flesh. However, their devotion was expected to be chaste and pure toward one another.

In Matthew 1:18-19, we have an example given to us of the seriousness of this covenant. It was binding, as was the marriage covenant. Here we see that Joseph was ready to put Mary away “privily”, when he thought she had been unfaithful before their marriage covenant. This putting away was a legal act because the “pre-marriage” covenant was binding. However, we know that the angel, Gabriel, cleared this up for Joseph and he went ahead with the marriage to Mary. Joseph was assured of her “chastity” and purity. There had been no fornication on her part and so he was willing to go through with the marriage.

This devotion was expected between those that were espoused. This “engagement” period was a preparation time for the marriage. It was a time for the bride and groom to prove their devotion to one another alone. They were to prove that they had singleness of heart for one another during this time to remain pure between themselves and others. In Romans 7:4 the Bible says, **“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.”** This shows us that we, as New Testament church members, are to be preparing to marry Jesus Christ. This espousal time spiritually, is for us to show our devotion to our “groom”, Jesus, and to Him alone.

In Acts 20:28, Jesus shows His devotion and love to us as New Testament church members. He was willing to give His life for His New Testament church and all those that would come after her. (John 17:20) In John 14:1-3, He shows His devotion in His preparation for the marriage to those that are faithful out of His New Testament churches. **“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will**

come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

In John 17:21-26, Jesus talks about His singleness for those that are a part of His Bride, His local church then and the others that would follow. There was no room for any others with the groom. His desire was to be one with His bride alone, no one else. There should be no room for any others with the bride, His local churches, as well.

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus has promised those local churches that He would be with her in a special way when they met together in church capacity. His devotion and time spent is with her alone in preparation for the time that they will be united in marriage. For any of the Lord’s, local, New Testament church members to partake in devotion, or worship, with any other is to commit spiritual fornication. He alone is to be the center of our devotion as the espoused bride of Christ. When we partake, or covenant, or devote ourselves to that “intimate” time with others spiritually, we are committing spiritual fornication. Remember the espousal of Joseph and Mary? Do we not enter into covenant relationship with our Lord when we submit to Scriptural baptism and membership in one of the Lord’s New Testament churches? Yes, we do and if we go outside of our devotion and singleness of worship to Him, we are guilty of breaking our espousal covenant to Him. To partake in the “worship” services of false churches, those without authority of Christ through a local, New Testament church, is to break our espousal covenant.

I Corinthians 10:8 tells us that Israel committed fornication. When you read the account in Exodus 33:17-35, you will see that they were not committing “physical” fornication. They were partaking in false worship. This was prior to their “covenant” of marriage with God, so they were committing spiritual fornication because they were espoused. They had agreed to the “espousal”, but they were not devoted and single as God had instructed them to be. This was false worship and by committing that which was to be for God alone, and giving it to another, they were committing spiritual fornication. 23,000 died that day because of their “fornication”. How many of the Lord’s local, New Testament church members have to “die” because of their spiritual fornication? How about our children dying and going to Hell because we show them no difference between the holy and profane? (Ezekiel 44:23) He warned us to learn from Israel. Are we learning?

In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, the Lord told some of His, local, New Testament churches to repent of their disobedience. In chapter 2, verse 5, he told Ephesus to repent or He would come quickly and remove His Holy Spirit as Comforter. This shows that they would lose their authority to function as the Lord’s. We may not know exactly when the Lord does this, but do you think “quickly” means 20 or 30 years? I look at the character and example of God in the Scriptures and I don’t see that He is mocked. (Galatians 6:7-8)

In Revelation 2:16, He tells the church at Pergamos to repent or else He would come quickly and fight. This church was guilty of having those in membership that held to false doctrine. They obviously were giving place to these doctrines, Balaam and the Nicolaitans, and God held the church responsible. Again, He told them to repent quickly. This meant that they had to change their behavior, mind, and attitude and then turn back to God. (Isaiah 55:7) In verse 20, He tells the church at Thyatira to repent because they allowed, “sufferest”, false doctrine to be promoted. They simply didn’t stand up against it and so therefore, they were partakers. (II John 10-11) This caused

a lot of people to be hindered and to fall into false worship. (verses 20-23)

In Revelation 3, Jesus warns the church at Sardis that there are some “things”, doctrines and/or practices, that were about to die if they didn’t “strengthen” them. Sometimes a church can just become “lax” and she must go back to the Word to become strong in the faith once again. However, God says that if they don’t repent, they will cease to be one of His churches. In chapter 3 and verse 19, He tells the Laodicean church that they don’t even recognize the condition they are in. They are so far removed, that they are blinded to the place they are in. He tells them to be zealous and repent. This did not mean to take their time. Zealous meant with zeal, which means with great energy or enthusiasm. **“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”**

As we look at the conditions of these churches, we see that they were in serious and grave danger of not belonging to the Lord any longer. God was quick to rebuke them sharply and to warn them of the impending doom that would come if they did not repent. For one of the Lord’s, local, New Testament church members to partake in, and go along with one of these churches in known error would put them in grave danger as well. God has commanded us to be “peculiar”, separate, and different. II Corinthians 6:16-17 says, **“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,”** I Peter 2:9 says, **“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:”**

We see that God held some of these churches responsible for what they did not do, as well as for what they did do. For us to stand by and partake in error, even allowing churches to think that we go along with error, would also be putting us in danger of spiritual fornication. We are to be devoted to Christ and the things that are His alone.

We should not devote the things of God to any other. To do so, is to break our espousal covenant that we have made with the Lord, Jesus Christ. God told the churches at Galatia that they were removed to “another” gospel. As members of the Lord’s, local, New Testament churches we are covenanted together with Christ to insist that we would only partake in that which is in truth. John 4:24 says, **“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”** Should we take this seriously? We should if we intend to be married to Jesus Christ one day because He will not settle for less. Ephesians 5:25-27 says, **“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”**