

ROMANS: CHARTER OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH
"Part XXV: God's Call To Side With HIS Associations"
(Romans 16:1-27)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

We Christians are to love one another according to Jesus' word in John 13:34! Does this mean we should **associate** with all who hail from historically solid churches, or who claim to know Christ? Consider the following situations that complicate this question:

(1) Canada's largest Protestant denomination, the United Church of Canada is a combination of Canada's Congregationalists, Methodists and the majority of its Presbyterians. In 1998, the elected moderator of the Church, Bill Phipps, granted an interview with the Ottawa Citizen in which he said the following: "I don't believe Jesus was God, but I'm no theologian . . . I don't believe Jesus is the only way to God. I don't believe he rose from the dead as a scientific fact. I don't know whether these things happened. It's an irrelevant question." (World, "The immoderator," by R. Mohler, 3/798, p. 18)

Can a believer in Christ fellowship with Moderator Bill Phipps if he denies Christ's deity, resurrection and sole mediatorship even though he is the moderator of Canada's largest PROTESTANT denomination? WHY or why NOT?

(2) Frank Schaeffer, son of the late famous Evangelical author, Francis Schaeffer, has joined the Greek Orthodox Church. Peter Gillquist, a former Campus Crusade for Christ official led a group of 2,000 evangelicals into the Greek Orthodox Church, and Sue Massey, former choir member of the First Baptist Church of Dallas has also joined the Greek Orthodox Church as representatives of a large switch of Evangelicals into Eastern Orthodoxy. ("Evangelicals converting to Orthodoxy," Waterbury Rep.-Am. in citing The Dallas Morning News)

However, the Eastern Orthodox, the umbrella group of which the Greek Orthodox Church is a part, hold Mary to be the "Mother of God"! It hails her as such in a mosaic in its famous Hagia Sophia cathedral overlooking Istanbul, cf. The World's Great Religions, vol. 3, p. 266-267. Can we associate with those Evangelicals who now hold Mary is the "Mother of God" in the Greek Orthodox Church to be venerated along with Christ as in Roman Catholicism?

Though we Christians are to love one another, are we free to ASSOCIATE with all who name Christ's name? Why?!

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

Need: "Since John 13:34 tells us Christians to love one another, am I as a Christian to be compatible and associate will ALL other people who CLAIM or in some way APPEAR to know Christ? WHY?!"

I. Though he was warm with many Christians, Paul warned believers to be SELECTIVE in even their CHURCH ASSOCIATIONS:

- A. Paul expressed close affinity with many of his fellow Christians in Rome in his Romans 16:1-16 salutation:
 - 1. Paul commended various believers who had helped him in his ministry during his apostolic journeys, Romans 16:6, 9a, 12a.
 - 2. He warmly referred to others as "beloved" in the Lord, 16:8, 9b.
 - 3. He recommended Phoebe, a servant in the Churches who had helped not only him, but many other Christians, Romans 16:1-2.
 - 4. Paul spoke highly of Aquilla and Priscilla, associates who had risked their very lives out of devotion to Paul and his work, 16:3-4.
- B. He also influenced other Christians to stay in good relationship with one another in the Romans 16:21-23 end of that salutation:
 - 1. Paul offered greetings to the Romans from Timothy, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Gaius and the Church with him, and from Erastus and Quartus, fellow Christians with Paul at Corinth, 16:21, 23a, c.
 - 2. His greeting motivated Paul's scribe, Tertius, who wrote Romans at Paul's dictation, to insert his own greeting as well, Rom. 16:22!
- C. Yet, in the **midst** of this **warmth**, Paul **warned against associating with** people his readers would meet **in a Church** setting: Paul warned about people who **caused** divisions **in** the church, meaning these had **access to relationships IN** the body, Romans 16:17; cf. Acts 20:30.

II. From the context, we note a godless GROUP to AVOID and a godly GROUP with whom to FELLOWSHIP as believers in Jesus Christ:

- A. Paul taught some did not serve Christ, but their own appetites, 17:18a.
- B. He also claimed **Satan** was active in the matter, trying to get believers **hooked** into **heeding** such self-serving parties to wrest them away from God's truths taught by their leaders to their harm, Rom. 17:17f:
 - 1. Paul's promise that God would soon bruise Satan under the feet of his readers reveals a spiritual conflict dimension: those who used smooth talk and flattery to deceive were led by Satan, 16:18b, 17.
 - 2. Thus, Satan tried to get believers to reject the truth taught by their leaders so they would be defeated, Rom. 16:17; 2 Tim. 2:24-26.
- C. Thus, there was a **godless** group to **avoid** along with the **godly** group with whom these believers were to **associate**, Romans 16:17b; 16:19.

- III. **Paul exposed features of these two contrasting parties so one could DISCERN GOD'S group FROM the one influenced by SATAN:**
- A. First, we are to adhere to the truths taught to us from Scripture by godly, approved teachers, Rom. 16:17; 2 Tim. 3:13-14.
 - B. Then, if we need to discern such godly from Satanically influenced teachers or leaders, we do so by heeding Romans 16:17-18 as follows:
 - 1. Godly parties promote church unity and peace as opposed to disunity and unrest in applying Biblical truths, 16:17 implied.
 - 2. Godly parties gently but *unflatteringly* "level" with others on what is the truth, even if this is uncomfortable, Rom. 16:18 implied.
 - 3. Godly parties will selflessly teach God's truths even if they are persecuted for doing so, Romans 16:18a implied. (2 Tim. 3:10-12)
 - C. Conversely, we can discern so as to avoid Satanically influenced teachers or leaders as well (as follows):
 - 1. We avoid those who cause divisions and stumblingblocks contrary to what credible Bible teachers instruct, 16:17; 2 Tim. 3:12-15.
 - 2. We avoid those who use smooth talk and flattery in relating their ideas or beliefs unto others, Romans 16:18; Jude 16 NIV.
 - 3. We avoid those who serve their own agendas instead of selflessly serving Christ's expressed will, Romans 16:18a.
- IV. **Then, in closing his epistle, Paul OPTIMISTICALLY expressed confidence that GOD to His GLORY could and would establish his readers strong in the truth and godly associations, Rom. 16:25-27.**

Application: *To be blessed in all our associations, (1) believe on Christ for salvation from sin and be removed from Satan's rule to Christ's kingdom, Jn. 3:16; Col. 1:12-13. (2) Then, (a) we confess post-salvation sins to renew quality fellowship with God and other godly believers (1 Jn. 1:9, 7) and (b) depend upon the indwelling Holy Spirit for HIS behavior control of us (Gal. 5:16, 22-23). (c) Then we obey Scripture, 1 Jn. 2:3. (3) In the process, we heed Romans 16:17-20 in discerning and selecting the right associations; we will be blessed in God's GROUP rather than be defeated by heeding Satan's bidding in the ungodly GROUP!*

Lesson: *Though our LOVE is to extend toward ALL (Rom. 13:8), our ASSOCIATIONS are NOT, for God and Satan are in conflict to influence ALL men, EVEN in CHRISTENDOM (2 Cor. 11:13-15): we must DISCERN to select RIGHT associations even in CHURCH settings!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

(1) The Waterbury Republican-American, 11/1/97 ran a story about a former Southern Baptist woman who converted to Islam.

In view of her heritage, I wondered **how** this lady could have made the switch from the Southern Baptist denomination to Islam. She knew the Gospel of faith alone in Christ alone. In fact, the article showed she had **begun** studying Islam **in order to counter** its *errors* so as to **convert Muslims to Christianity!**

Well, in reading the article, I noticed this lady's husband recounted that as his wife studied the Koran, she "no **longer** had an interest in going to **bars or parties!**"

When I read this part of the article, I saw how this lady had left herself open to adopting error in part for leaving herself vulnerable to the wrong **associations!** A Christian is not supposed to frequent **bars** where people spend time exposing themselves to control by alcohol opposite the clear teaching of Ephesians 5:18! A Christian has no part indulging in parties where he or she can become influenced by the wrong crowd, leaving themselves open to all sorts of erroneous ideas.

This lady's **associations** had in part left her **open** to adopting the Islamic **error** as she had compromised her capacity to discern truth from error and stick to the Christian truths of her background!

(2) Byang Kato, a son of a witch doctor in Nigeria, West Africa came to faith in Christ through the ministry of a missionary with SIM International. He then attended the mission schools and later obtained his doctorate at the Dallas Theological Seminary. He earned Dallas Seminary's Lewis Sperry Chafer award for spiritual vitality as well!

Dr. Byang Kato stood up in a meeting of religious leaders in Africa to **counter** an effort pushed in the meeting to mix Christianity with pagan African animism. Dr. Kato testified before the ecumenists that his own background as a witch doctor's son had not delivered him from spiritual darkness like Biblical Christianity had done!

How did Byang Kato arrive at such a solid Christian stand in spite of his pagan heritage? Part of the reason was his repeated choices in life to associate with the **godly** who promoted God's **Word!**