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# Those That Oppose Themselves

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— Keith R. Blades

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We've all heard the expression, "So and so is his own worst enemy." It is commonly used to express the fact that a person's own attitude or action is working against him. By what he is thinking, or by what he is doing, he is actually hindering his ability to make any progress in some endeavor. He has deceived himself and is actually doing to himself what an opponent would do to him. As such, being "his own worst enemy" he not only does things that directly oppose him achieving some objective, he actually cooperates with any who would want to see him fail. Most of the time this is done in ignorance. It is obvious that to deceive ourselves and oppose ourselves does not make sense. Few things could be more foolish than to stand in your own way. So usually we are ignorant that we are doing this, not realizing that we have been deceived into thinking that what we are doing is really beneficial, when in truth it is not. However, to oppose ourselves in any endeavor is not only foolish, it is serious. Not only do we hinder our ability to make progress, we actually assure that no progress can be made until we change our minds. When we oppose ourselves we are ensnared in a trap of our own making, and we remain ensnared until we stop opposing ourselves. Hence, as the expression rightly says, when we oppose ourselves we are the "worst enemy" we could possibly have.

It would be bad enough if opposing ourselves was something limited to just the affairs of this life. But it is not. Unfortunately, it is a common Christian affliction. We have a tendency to think that self-deceit and self-opposition would be a trait of the unsaved, as in Acts 18:6 where the unbelieving Jews "*opposed themselves, and blasphemed.*" However, it should not come as a

surprise to us that a Christian can also deceive himself, oppose himself, and so hinder his edification. Paul encountered it frequently throughout his ministry and we find him dealing with examples of it in our epistles. For example,...

"Let no man DECEIVE HIMSELF. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."

(1 Corinthians 3:18)

"For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he DECEIVETH HIMSELF."

(Galatians 6:3)

As astounding as it sounds, Christians are often their own "worst enemies," especially when it comes to making progress in the "godly edifying" God wants us to have. Often times Christians "oppose themselves" in this area, playing right into the hand of Satan and his policy of evil against us.

In II Timothy 2, the apostle Paul deals with Timothy about this very thing. In so doing, he shows that instead of it being an uncommon thing, it will be frequently encountered throughout this dispensation of grace.

23 But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.

24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient,

25 In meekness instructing THOSE THAT OPPOSE THEMSELVES; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

26 And *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

(II Timothy 2:23-26)

It is evident from this passage, that Christians who "oppose themselves" are going to be a common breed. Timothy had a large number to deal with and Paul taught him how to respond to them. However, Paul also makes it evident here that when a Christian opposes himself it is a very serious problem. He has played right into Satan's hands without a fight. He has fully cooperated with the Adversary, and it has landed him in the "snare of the devil." And, amazingly, he doesn't even know it.

To oppose ourselves, therefore, is a very foolish, detrimental and dangerous thing to do. It is also costly, especially in the terms of edification. For the precious promised fruits of godly edification are forfeited by us for no other reason than that we ourselves foolishly hinder ourselves from obtaining them.

### How is this done?

Just how is it that a Christian can oppose himself and hinder his edification? What comprises it? Simply put a Christian opposes himself when he thinks differently about edification than God does. In particular, when in his thinking he opposes the very things necessary to achieve godly edifying. Self-deception and self-opposition are activities of our mind. Hence, when we think differently than God does about the very things He says are necessary for our

edification, then we oppose ourselves and hinder our edification.

Edification, of course, is a function of the word of God. Consequently, the things God says are necessary for our edification are things about our attitude and approach to His word. Hence, it is our thinking about the word of God and how we handle it that is the issue in whether we oppose ourselves or not.

### 3 Issues

As Paul deals with the problem of Christians opposing themselves, he naturally deals with the very things God says are necessary for godly edifying to occur. Though pointed out and described in various ways, there are primarily three of these. Opposition in our thinking to any or all of them means we are opposing ourselves and hindering our edification. Briefly described, they are as follows:

#### Opposition to the authority and power of the word of God

Astounding as it may sound, Christians are often guilty of thinking differently than God does about the authority and power of His word. Instead of recognizing its final, absolute, and exclusive authority in our lives, we often only give it lip-service. Our own ideas of what we think the truth is, along with popular opinion, the traditions of men, and the dictates of society, often have far more of an influence upon us than what the Bible actually says. When confronted with the fact that our thinking is contrary to what God says in His word, we often struggle to get away from what God says in order to retain our own preferred ideas. In this we are like many of the Corinthians, who had yet to knock human opinion and man's approbation off of the pedestal and replace it with the word of God. We need to heed what Paul said to the Corinthians,...

18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.

20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.

(I Corinthians 3:18-20)

Godly edifying is not something the wisdom of this world can produce. Nor will our own ideas, judgments, or experience-based opinions produce it. In fact, they will hinder it. The wisdom of this world, along with our own ideas and experiences, are actually strongholds of opposition to the truth. Paul described them as such in II Corinthians.

4 (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

5 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;

(II Corinthians 10:4-5)

Our imaginations, natural thinking, and experiences are often in opposition to what God thinks. However, God's word is designed to change our thinking, renew our minds, and produce godly edifying. Yet if we give our imaginations, natural thinking, or experiences precedence over what God says, our minds become a stronghold of resistance to godly edifying.

Edification, once again, is a function of the word of God effectually working in us as we believe and go by what it says *because God says it*. What He says goes, regardless of what we think or experience. Consequently, if we do not submit to what God says, we oppose our own edification. The degree to which a Christian places greater value upon his own ideas and experiences, or

upon the opinions, traditions, doctrines, and judgments of men, is the degree to which he opposes himself.

### Opposition to "rightly dividing the word of truth"

Godly edifying not only requires submission to the authority and power of the word of God, we must also handle the Bible as God tells us to. If we handle the Bible improperly, contrary to the way God tells us to, we will also oppose ourselves and hinder our edification.

In view of the fact that God has a two-fold plan and purpose, not everything in the Bible is describing what God is doing with us today. The vast majority of the Scriptures pertain to the outworking of God's plan and purpose with the nation of Israel. However, God has temporarily suspended His program and dealings with Israel, and brought in a new and different dispensation when He raised up Paul as a brand new apostle. We, today, live in the dispensation of the grace of God. We are members of God's "new creation," the "one new man," the church the body of Christ, and Paul is our apostle. Accordingly, it is in Paul's epistles — Romans through Philemon — that God sets forth what He is doing with us in this dispensation.

In view of this, as Paul commands in II Timothy 2:15, we must "rightly divide the word of truth" in order to handle it properly.

15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

(II Timothy 2:15)

To "rightly divide" something means to make the division in it that separates it into two proper portions. And this is exactly what must be done with the Bible, "the word of truth," in view of God's two distinct and different programs. We cannot act as if there is no difference between God's program for Israel and His program for us

today. There is, as is plainly evident. What's more, no amount of disregard for the facts will alter this. Instead, we only deceive ourselves and thereby oppose ourselves when we do try to disregard this. Wherefore, "godly edifying" will not take place if we fail to obey God's command to acknowledge and honor the great dispensational change He has made.

### Opposition to edification

The third of the three ways that we oppose ourselves when it comes to our edification has to do with our attitude towards edification itself.

It is evident that God places great value upon our edification. In fact, to say it that way is to put it mildly. For in truth God longs for it. Indeed, everything He has done for us in this dispensation testifies to this. Consider, for example, that in this dispensation He is treating us as "sons" so that we may be taught directly by Him. Hence, He has given us the Holy Spirit, "that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God." In accordance with this, we have "the mind of Christ," with the unheard of privilege of being mutual-counsellors together with God. He has taken us into His privy counsel and desires us to delight with Him in the genius of His "manifold wisdom" now on display. For this reason He has "abounded unto us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery of his will." He has revealed unto us His "hidden wisdom," the "deep things of God," so that we can thrill with Him in the excellency of what He is doing. All His "treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are ours to enjoy with Him, as He teaches us about them and we understand them. Moreover, He has seen to it that all of this knowledge can be ours, for He has recorded it in "the word of truth" and as such has preserved it for our edification.

Without a doubt, God longs for our edification. It is precious in His sight. The question now is, Is it precious in our sight? It certainly ought to be. We

ought to desire it more than anything.

In I Corinthians 15, as Paul provided corrective doctrine regarding the truth of the resurrection of the dead, he reproved the Corinthians with these words:

34 Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I SPEAK *THIS* TO YOUR SHAME.

(I Corinthians 15:34)

Most of the Corinthians did not look upon edification like God does. They thought little of it, as do many Christians today. It's a shame when Christians don't know what God wants them to know. It's a shame because every provision has been made by God for us to know. Moreover, as a father who enjoys the "sonship" of his child, God has made it evident that He craves the intimacy of fellowship that comes from us being like-minded with Him. No wonder Paul would say to the Corinthians, "for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame." For it is a shame, pure and simple.

A popular slogan of our day says, *A mind is a terrible thing to waste*. How much more is this true for a Christian, who, though he has "the mind of Christ," does not share God's love for edification. That truly is a mind being wasted.

Obviously, if we do not value and esteem our edification as much as God does, then we ourselves stand in the way of being edified. We foolishly oppose ourselves, hindering our possession of one of the very things for which Christ died — "godly edifying."

No one enjoys it more when we oppose ourselves than Satan himself. He knows that the key to thwarting our edification lies in our attitude and approach toward the word of God. His policy of evil against us dedicates itself to corrupting how we ought to think. However, like a soldier who captures a position without firing a shot, so Satan has no struggle whatsoever with a Christian who readily cooperates with how he wants him to

think. He walks right into "the snare of the devil" and Satan easily fulfils his desire of keeping him from being edified. When we oppose ourselves we truly are our own worst enemy. — *Keith R. Blades*