

## Doctrinal of Denial of the Faith

1. Without question it is the known will of the Lord that His followers be faithful to His cause and kingdom.
  - *Jude 3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*
  
2. To deny the Lord Jesus Christ involves more than a momentary relapse of faith. It involves an abandonment of the faith.
  - *Matthew 10:33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.*
  
3. In the making of disciples the matter of faithfulness becomes part of the gospel message.
  - *Matthew 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*
  
4. Under normal conditions people sincerely believe they can be and will be faithful to the Lord even to the point of death. Peter thought this as did all the disciples.
  - *Matthew 26:35 Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.*
  - *Mark 14:31 But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.*
  
5. The Lord knows the heart of His own all too well and so discourages spiritual boasting especially in this matter.
  - *Matthew 26:34 Jesus said unto him [Peter], Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.*
  
6. To Peter's surprise and shame but not to the Savior's, Peter did deny the Lord, only to repent and weep bitterly over what he had done.
  - *Matthew 26:75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.*

7. Those who deny the claims of Christ and the person of Christ will also deny the teachings of Christ such as the doctrine of the resurrection. These same individuals will move on to bring in damnable heresies.
- *Luke 20:27 Then came to him certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection; and they asked him,*
  - *2 Peter 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*
8. The Lord has promised to reward those who do not deny Him or His doctrine especially if suffering is involved.
- *2 Timothy 2:12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:*
9. There are four distinguishing marks of those who deny [reject, disavow] the Lord to the point they become worthy of ultimate judgment.
- *Titus 1:16 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable [detestable; idolatrous], and disobedient [unpersuadable], and unto every good work reprobate [morally worthless].*
    - ❖ First distinguishing mark.           The absence of good works.
    - ❖ Second distinguishing mark.       Being abominable.
    - ❖ Third distinguishing mark.        A life of disobedience.
    - ❖ Fourth distinguishing mark.       A life of reprobation.
10. Every professing Christian should examine himself or herself by asking the following questions?
- ❖ *“Am I denying Christ by not performing any good works?”*
  - ❖ *“Is my life an open abomination in the sight of God? Is it detestable and characterized by a form of idolatry?”*
  - ❖ *“Am I disobedient? Can no one persuade me to do what is right?”*
  - ❖ *“Are the works I perform morally worthless because the motive is wrong?”*
11. Those that live a life of faith will not be as likely to deny the Lord of Glory in a single moment of crisis.
12. However, if such a moment does occur, as in the case of Peter there is still room to hope provided gospel repentance is genuine for ultimately the safety and security of the believer is not based on good works, including the good work of non-denial of Christ. Our salvation and security is rooted in the person and work of Christ, who He is and what He has done.

- *2 Timothy 2:13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.*
13. Because tribulation or suffering will come to the Church, Christians must think through ahead of time how they will respond, by the grace of God.
- *Revelation 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*
14. Christians must also consider what their attitude will be towards those who have betrayed Christ by denying Him provided there is genuine repentance involved. The distinct cases of Judas and Peter should guide the heart's response in this matter.

## **The Donatist Controversy**

The **Diocletian Persecution** was the last, and most severe, episode of persecution of the Christians in the Roman Empire. It took place under the Emperor Diocletian (c. 245–c. 312).

### **The First Edict of Persecution**

On February 24, 303, Diocletian's first "Edict against the Christians" was published. This edict ordered the destruction of Christian Scriptures and places of worship across the Empire, while prohibiting Christians from assembling for worship. Those that refused to surrender their sacred writings faced imprisonment and death.

### **The Second and Third Edicts of Persecution**

Later that year, after a fire in Nicomedia and insurrections in Syria and Armenia, Diocletian issued two further edicts, one ordering that the Christians of Nicomedia be put to torture and death as punishment for arson, the other ordering that the bishops and teachers of the churches throughout his domains be imprisoned and forced by torture to sacrifice to the gods of Roman paganism.

### **The Fourth Edict of Persecution**

In 304, a fourth edict made the persecution general: not merely the Christian leaders, but all Christians, were to offer sacrifices to the gods, compelled by torture if necessary.

### **Many Martyrs for the Master**

According to one estimate, a total of 3,000–3,500 Christians were killed in the persecution, while many others suffered torture or imprisonment.

During the days of the persecution laymen offered sacrifices to the Roman gods, clergy turned over the holy books to be burned. Others held out, enduring imprisonment and torture, risking death.

After the persecution ended those who had not be strong in the faith to the point of enduring torture and perhaps death sought to return to the local assembly for worship and fellowship. Some people in the local assemblies believed that the bishops of the church (in their office of speaking for the whole church) could impose an appropriate penance and readmit the lapsed based upon authentic sorrow.

Other, maintaining a zeal for the martyrs, held that only those who risked martyrdom by resisting the authorities and confessing their faith had the moral capital to dispense forgiveness.

Moreover clergy, in their view, could never be reinstated, and could be readmitted to the church only as laymen.

### Opposing Sides

**Caecilius.** As an archdeacon, Caecilius had opposed excessive honoring of the faithful confessors to the point of prohibiting their devotees from bringing them food in prison. When Caecilius was elected bishop of Carthage, the controversy broke into an open schism or division. Those who opposed Caecilius elected Majorinus as bishop of Carthage arguing that one of the bishops that had consecrated Caecilius was a *trahitor* and therefore the consecration of Caecilius was invalid.

**Donatus.** When Majorinus died soon after his election those who held a strict position for church membership elected Donatus in his place. In Donatus the movement found an eloquent, able, and charismatic leader. From this point onward the division would be called Donatism.

### Two Issues to Consider

The Donatist controversy concerns two issues. The first question was whether the act of penance can effect a reconciliation whereby the apostate, or in some cases specifically the traditor, may be returned to full communion. Many Christians argued that penance was precisely for such cases, though at the time the Church still followed the discipline of public penance whereby a penitent for such a grievous offense would spend years, even decades, first outside the doors of the church begging for the prayers of those entering, then kneeling inside the church building during services, then standing with the congregation, and finally receiving the Eucharist [lit. thanksgiving] again in a long progress toward full reconciliation. The Donatists held that acts of denial of the faith after receiving baptism, rendered one unfit for further membership in the Church.

The second question was the validity of religious acts such as marriage, baptism and funerals when performed by priests and bishops who had been apostates under the persecution. The Donatists held that all such sacraments were invalid: by their sinful act, such clerics had rendered themselves incapable of celebrating valid acts of worship. This is known as: **ex opere operantis** - Latin for **from the work of the one doing the working**, that is, that the validity of the sacrament depends upon the worthyness and holiness of the minister confecting it.

Other Christians said no, the operating principle to guide the clergy was *ex opere operator* - **from the work having been worked**, in other words, that the validity of the acts of worship depends upon the holiness of God, the minister being a mere instrument of God's work, so that any priest or bishop, even one in a state of mortal sin, who speaks

the formula of the sacrament with valid matter and the intent of causing the sacrament to occur acts validly.

To the Donatists, a minister who had been an apostate but who repented could speak the words of consecration forever, but he could no longer preside over communion. Donatists cited Cyprian who had argued "*How can he who lacks the Spirit confer the Spirit's gifts?*"

To the non Donatist, a person who received the Lord's Supper [Eucharist] from the hands of an unrepentant sinning priest still received Christ's Body and Blood and their own sacramental life was left undamaged by the priest's faults.

In the background of these theological issues of ecclesiology and hamartiology was also the issue of martyrdom and how important martyrdom was to the church's identity. Donatists believed that the true church must always be a church of the martyrs and that any relationship to the state that is not one of being persecuted is an indication that true faith and moral purity has been lost.

### **No Solution for the Saints**

This schism was never resolved. Every town in North Africa had a bishop and a Donatist bishop, often their churches were within shouting distance of each other. They continued to battle vehemently until Islam swept over North Africa, eliminating all Christianity, Donatist and non Donatist alike.