

(Ezra 4:1-2) - These “adversaries” were early Samaritans who had been brought into the lands of the former Kingdom of Israel after its fall to the Assyrians. Notice that God is referred to in v. 1 as “*the LORD God of Israel,*” which is God of all grace, God of salvation, and God of the covenant. But when the Samaritans spoke of God in v. 2, they referred to Him only as “*God*” (Elohim), the almighty God of creation. God IS Elohim, but He is more to His children as He has revealed Himself as God of salvation Who saves His chosen people by His grace through the Lord Jesus Christ and based upon His righteousness alone. These Samaritans had committed many offences against the God of Israel. They had intermarried with those left behind from the exile, and their worship was mixed with idolatry (*2 Kings 17:25-41*). *2 Kings 17:33* describes their attitude - “*They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence.*” Their claim that they feared the LORD was a lie as indicated by their idolatry.

These Samaritans wanted to become partners in the building work of the temple, yet they were still adversaries. They wanted to partner in the work either to ruin it or to influence it to their benefit, and probably corrupt it with their idolatry. They did this on the claim that “we seek your God as you do.” They probably genuinely believed that they sought the same God in the same way, yet they also added, “and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria.” This means they sacrificed without either a temple or a priesthood, which was obviously against the commandment of God. This completely contradicted their claim, “we seek your God as you do.” They were like those who call themselves “Christian” today but who deny the truth of God’s grace in salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ and preach salvation conditioned on sinners rather than on Christ alone.

(Ezra 4:3) - Zerubbabel, Joshua (the high priest), and the leaders of Israel refused to let these Samaritans join them in rebuilding the temple. It may seem that the leaders were mean and unkind, not showing what people today call “Christian” love and kindness. But what Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the others were showing here is the very “*holiness, without which no man shall see the LORD*” (*Heb. 12:14*). It is separation from the world that God commands His people to maintain (*Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:14-18*).

As He has always done since the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden, Christ has been building His temple, the church. This church is made up of God’s elect, chosen before the foundation of the world by God in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was chosen to be their Surety, Substitute, Redeemer, and Preserver to establish the only ground upon which God justifies, adopts, saves, and brings them to glory. Christ has established the foundation upon which His church is built by His obedience unto death on the cross, dying for their sins imputed to Him, and establishing a perfect righteousness which God has imputed to them. This is confirmed by His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into glory where He sat down on the right hand of the Father and ever lives to make intercession for them. He continues in building His church by calling His people to Himself by the power of the Holy Spirit under the preaching of the Gospel truth, giving them spiritual life and faith to believe in Him and submit to His righteousness as their only ground of salvation with all its blessings and benefits. He saves and preserves them by His grace and not by their works or their wills (*Eph. 2:8-10*). He does not build His church upon or with lies that deny the glory of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. His church is “*the pillar and ground of the truth*” (*1 Tim. 3:15*).

Just as Zerubbabel and the leaders told the unbelieving Samaritans, “*Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God,*” the Lord commands His people, as members of His church, to reject any offers of fellowship and aid from false Christians who claim to be our brethren but who deny the doctrine of Christ. Christ uses His people and His truth to build

His church into “*the church of the living God*” (1 Tim. 3:15). The true church of the living God, true believers who know and love the doctrine of Christ, cannot be in fellowship with, receive support from, or be in support of those who deny that same doctrine -

2 John (7) For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. (8) Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. (9) Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. (10) If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: (11) For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

Believers are commanded by God to strive to maintain the purity of God’s grace and truth as it is in Christ, the glory of His Person and the power of His finished work of redemption. It is not an issue of minor differences in doctrine among true Christians. It is not an issue of “Calvinism vs. Arminianism.” IT IS AN ISSUE OF THE TRUE GOSPEL VS. ALL FALSE GOSPELS. It is an issue of HOW GOD SAVES SINNERS. Is salvation conditioned on the works and/or the wills of sinners, or is it conditioned on God’s will and Christ’s work alone? God’s word says that all of salvation is conditioned on the will of God and the merits of Christ’s work as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people who were chosen and given to Him by the Father before the world began (*Rom. 9:15-16; Eph. 1:3-11; 2 Tim. 1:9-10*). There is no godly fellowship between those whom God has brought to believe this Gospel truth and those who claim to be saved but who deny this Gospel truth. To deny this, or compromise this, in the name of love and kindness is to deny Christ and the purity of His grace and truth. It is to corrupt God’s grace and truth as well as the godly love which God’s true children are commanded to express towards one another. It is to be a partaker (partner, fellowshipper) of their evil deeds rather than the holiness without which no man will see the Lord.

(Ezra 4:4-6) - The response of the unbelieving Samaritans to Zerubbabel’s refusal to accept their fellowship and help show not only their true evil motives but also their hatred for God’s truth and God’s people. If they could not enter into the fellowship and subvert it stealthily from within, they discouraged the workers, troubled the builders, and lobbied against them in the court of King Cyrus. They wrote letters to the king falsely accusing them as troublemakers and rebels against the king.

Here we see how the natural man responds to Gospel truth that exposes him for what he is (*John 3:19-20; Rom. 16:17-18; Gal. 1:6-9; Jude*). But we must remember that this kind of persecution is common to all true believers when we stand firm against the unbelieving world (*John 15:18–16:3*). We must also remember what the Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount - “*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you*” (*Matt. 5:10-12*).