

ANTI-ISM

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About the author...

Perry Cotham was born to Christian parents January 5, 1912. He was baptized at an early age began preaching soon after in 1929 at the age of 17. He entered Freed-Hardeman College (then a junior college) in September, 1929 and graduated in June, 1931. He then entered college at his hometown of Murray, Kentucky and graduated from Murray State University in June of 1934. While attending college he preached for several of the area churches and conducted meetings. October 1934 Perry began full time local work with the church in Shawnee, Oklahoma. He had a prosperous work, with a new congregation being established. While there he did much radio preaching and conducted meetings in the area. This he did in other places later in local work.

Perry was married to Teresa Overby (the daughter of a well known gospel preacher) in Muskogee, Oklahoma on June 25, 1936. The Overby family was formerly from Murray. (Teresa passed away January 7, 1998). Brother Cotham has two sons and one daughter, eight grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

After moving from Shawnee, Perry did local work in Oklahoma City and Wewoka, Oklahoma, Paris, Texas, Nashville, Tennessee, Duncan, Oklahoma and Grand Prairie and Big Spring, Texas, in that order. In 1972 he and his wife moved back to Grand Prairie so he could be engaged in full time, word-wide evangelistic work. Perry has preached in all of the fifty states of America and in all the inhabited continents of the world, including about 70 nations. He has held several debates, two of which are in print. He has written sixteen gospel tracts which have been widely distributed throughout the world. He has also helped to buy and distribute thousands of Bibles in different dialects, besides distributing his debate books on the Holy Spirit and miracles today. Perry continues to make his home in Grand Prairie and to do much preaching. He at times assists Brown Trail School of Preaching in teaching some special classes, but his main work is to preach and distribute tracts and Bibles in all parts of the world. Many thousands have been baptized during his many years of ministry.

Anti-ism Defined

The word “anti-ism” is not found in the dictionary, but the word “anti” is found and defined as (adjective) “opposed to a given proposal, policy, etc.” The word means being against something. There are many words with the prefix “anti,” such as “anti-Christ” [meaning an opponent of Christ] (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). anti-Christian, anti-slavery, anti-Biblical, etc. (*Webster’s* 115.)

In the religious realm, two words are often used with opposite meanings, namely, “liberalism” and “anti-ism.” These words mean going to an extreme, either to the right or to the left. Jehovah God commanded Joshua, the new leader who took the place of Moses following his death, to *“Be strong and of a good courage...that thou mayest observe to do according to all the Law...turn not from it to the right hand or to the left...”* (Joshua 1:6-7, emph., PBC). “liberalism” is going *beyond* God’s Word and adding to it (2 John 9); whereas, “anti-ism” is *making laws* for God and *opposing* that which the Lord allows. A simple illustration of both extremes would be that of driving a car on the road. There is a ditch on both sides, to the right hand and to the left. To go off the road on either side is dangerous and could cause a wreck.

Of course, the church has always had her problems with teaching strict obedience to God’s will in all things. This was true in the early days of the church (cf. Acts 15:1-34; Galatians 2:4-5). It is likewise true today. Swinging from the extreme side of “liberalism” (going beyond God’s Word in

certain things), some have gone to the extreme side of “anti-ism,” or “radicalism” (making man’s opinions and customs equal to the Scriptures). As is always true, the tendency of a reaction is to go too far, whether it be extreme “liberalism” or extreme “anti-ism” or “conservatism.”

In keeping with the general theme of this lectureship of being “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh” a question regarding our faith and practice, we will notice some examples of “anti-ism” in the body of Christ and of its harmful effects. But first, we need to note who is the head of the church and has all authority.

Christ All Authority

Scripture emphasizes that the Lord’s church is the “called out,” or “the saved” (Acts 2:46; Matthew 16:18), and that *Christ* has “all authority” (Matthew 22:18, ASV) and is the only head of the church, “which is his body” (Ephesians 1:22-23). Also, the church is to be “subject unto Christ” (Ephesians 5:23-24) in all things, according to His divinely revealed will in the New Testament (John 16:13; Jude 3; Revelations 22:18-19). But Christians are to learn that our personal preferences and opinions may not necessarily be the precepts that others are to live by and promote. Our teaching (preaching) is authoritative only to the extent that it is supported by a proper use of the Holy Scriptures. It is easy for false teachers to come into congregations and persuade some members to believe and practice things in contrary to the will of Christ. This happened to some of the brethren in Galatia, according to Paul’s language: *“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ”* (Galatians 1:6-7). So, whatsoever we do in the word or in deed, we are to *“do all in the name—[by the authority - PBC]— of the Lord Jesus...”* (Colossians 3:17). Now we need to note some things about God’s commands and “anti-ism.”

Generic And Specific Commands

The Lord’s commands are both *generic* and *specific*. A generic, or general, command is one that authorizes a certain action but does not give the details as to *how* that command shall be obeyed. A specific commandment is one that not only authorizes a certain action but also gives details as to how it should be carried out. Furthermore, a commandment may be mixed, that is, partly generic and partly specific.

Briefly note a simple Biblical example, which will make these distinctions clear. God told Noah to build an ark, specifying the dimensions and the kind of wood to use as gopher wood (Genesis 6). Noah built the ark according to the Lord’s directions (Hebrews 11:7), he obeyed God. Had God said make the ark out of “wood”—generic—any kind of wood would have been acceptable, but since the Lord specified “gopher wood,” it would have been wrong for Noah to have used any other kind of wood, or some other wood in addition to gopher wood.

However, the command to build an ark of gopher wood, according to the dimensions, included any tool—hammer, ax, saw, etc.—at Noah’s convenience for building the ark. A commandment authorizes everything essential to obeying that commandment. Therefore, God’s command to Noah was generic in reference to the tools to be used in the construction of the ark, but specific in reference to the kind of wood to be used.

Moreover, the Lord teaches by three methods: (1) direct command or statement, (2) approved (apostolic) example, and (3) necessary inference. To illustrate: repentance is a command (Acts 17:30; Luke 13:3). To eat the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week is an approved (apostolic) example (Acts 20:7). Since Jesus came "up out of the water" at His baptism (Mark 1:10), it is a necessary inference to say that He first went down into the water (cf. Acts 8:36-39; Romans 6:4).

Examples of Anti-ism

With this background study, we are now better prepared to note some examples of "anti-ism" among believers in Christ.

1. *Anti-Sunday-Bible-School classes*, either before or after the regular general worship assembly. In giving what is commonly called the Great Commission, Christ gave to His disciples four command: (1) "go," (2) "teach," (3) baptize, and (4) teach the baptized (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). These are all generic commands. The word "go" is generic with respect to means of travel to be used. One can go by walking or riding. If he rides, he can use a donkey, a boat, a car, a train, or a plane. He can use any means available to him that seems expedient, for that part is optional. In fact, a way of travel may be scripturally right, but not expedient (cf. Acts 8:28, 31; 38; 27:2). All should carefully mark the difference between the essentials and the incidentals. The Lord did not specify as to how the teaching of the gospel was to be done. The gospel must be preached—that is the essential thing. The ways of teaching/preaching, in small groups or large audiences, publicly or privately, in classes arranged by age groups, by oral or written means, by radio or television, are purely optional. Various ways were used in apostolic days. The Sunday-morning-class method of teaching comes under the command to teach. The anti-Sunday-Bible-School faction is an example of brethren treating a matter of opinion as a matter of faith. Division of the church is the result.

2. *Anti-individual communion cups in observance of the Lord's Supper*. The command to assemble and worship God is found in passages as Hebrews 10:25, 1 Corinthians 11:18, and Acts 20:7. Yet the Lord does not specify the kind of place or the hour of assembly. No one is authorized by Jehovah God to make a law to tell Christians where to meet to worship or at what hour on the "first day of the week" to worship. The very command to assemble for worship authorizes some place and some hour for the meeting. In worship, the partaking of the "cup" (which is "the fruit of the vine," grape juice, Matthew 26:27-27, 1 Corinthians 11:25), it is not unscriptural to take the "cup" out of one vessel (although it might not be sanitary), neither is it unscriptural to take "the fruit of the vine" out of several containers. The number of the containers used would depend, of course, upon the size of the congregation. But to say that the "cup" must be taken out of one container, and only one, by the whole congregation, is to make a human law where God has not made one. In the communion, one does not partake of the literal "cup"—container, whether it be a glass or a mug, but of the contents, the fruit of the vine. There is only one "cup."

Faith is based upon the Word of God (Romans 10:17), but expediency means that which is advantageous, or that which is wise in a given situation. Expediency has to do with generic or general commands. Under generic command man has liberty, and there may be diversity in practice. Here is where many people get confused. It is just as great a sin for man to make optional matter (a matter of opinion) binding as it is to make a required matter (a matter that is essential) optional. Therefore, since "the cup" in the Lord's Supper is "the fruit of the vine," Christians have no choice as to the element to be used, for that has been specified. If they should add fried chicken or ham to the Lord's

table, that would be sinful—going beyond that which is written (2 John 9). There is no need to have a direct statement in the bible saying “Thou shalt not add chicken or ham to the Lord’s Supper.” The law of exclusion forbids their use. The law of exclusion forbade Noah from using hickory, pine, etc., as wood to the building of the ark.

However, the number of containers for “the fruit of the vine,” or “the cup,” has not been specified. Therefore, this choice has been left to the wisdom and judgment of man, for in respect to the containers, the law of expediency would apply. Individual communion cups can be used.

Likewise, Christians are commanded to sing in worship to God (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Hebrews 2:12). Whether song books, seats, or lights are used is a matter of expediency. If they are used, we still just sing — doing what God commands. But if we use mechanical instruments of music, along with singing, we have added another element of the same class, playing on an instrument. The specific command to sing excludes all other kinds of making music. Instrumental music, therefore, becomes an addition to what God specified and is wrong. Hence, there is no authority for the use of instruments of music in worship to God. But using song books does not add to what the Lord commanded, that is, sing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,” as the New Testament authorizes.

3. *Anti-orphan homes and homes for the aged to help care for the orphans and the elderly.* James wrote: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). The early church assisted those in need (Acts 6:1-6; 11:27-30; 1 Timothy 5:16). Helping the needy is a matter of faith; the *how* to do this work is in the realm of human judgment. Since there are no specific, detailed methods outlined in the New Testament, god has given man freedom to choose his own means of benevolence. The means and methods of this care for orphans, widows, the aged, etc., are optional for the local congregation.

Some use James 1:27 to teach that the church cannot, in any way, support orphans in what is called an orphans’ home, that the Scriptural way to care for orphans and widows is for each individual to take them into his private home. It is not wrong for Christians to take widows and orphans into their homes, but it is wrong to say that this is the only way such benevolence must be done. (cf. Romans 15:25-27; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9).

4. *Anti-church cooperation in doing evangelistic work for the spreading of the gospel.* Every church has a work to do in proclaiming the good news of man’s salvation to the whole world (cf. Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Philippians 2:15-16). The church is “*the pillar and the ground of the truth*” (1 Timothy 3:15). In the execution of this general command, when no specific methods are bound, each congregation is left free under God to make its own choices in the methods used to expedite the command. The elders of the church have the oversight of the work of that congregation and, in matters of judgment, can make necessary decisions for accomplishing the Lord’s will. Elders do not have charge of two or more congregations—*only one* (Acts 14:23). since this is true, any organization larger or smaller than the local church is without Scriptural authority. However, the Scriptures teach that another congregation, or churches, may of their own free will give assistance to a church to aid in the accomplishing of the work of preaching the gospel, or in any specific, scripturally authorized work. Churches cooperated in apostolic times in preaching the gospel.

The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch in Syria to help this young congregation (Acts 11:22-24). The church at Antioch later sent out Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark on their first

missionary journey (Acts 13:1-5). the church at Antioch also sent out Paul on his second and third journeys, and on these journeys other congregations at times helped support him (2 Corinthians 11:8). After several years of traveling and preaching, Paul addressed the good church at Philippi with these commendable words concerning their help: *“How ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica, ye sent once and again unto my necessity”* (Philippians 4:15-16). This surely implies that even at that time, when the church at Philippi helped sustain Paul in Thessalonica, other churches could properly have had fellowship with Paul in preaching the gospel if they had so desired. Hence, two or more churches, if need be, may cooperate in the work of evangelism.

The churches in Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia gave for the relief of those who were in need in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8 and 9; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). These churches exercised choices in the matter of their giving: *“...they were willing of themselves”* (2 Corinthians 8:3, 8, 10). The church in Jerusalem, after the conference concerning the question of circumcision, sent Judas and Silas to the church in Antioch, along with Paul and Barnabas, with a letter to help teach the church in Antioch, as well as other brethren (Acts 15: 22-32). So there was cooperation of churches in teaching.

Thus, the New Testament has given these examples of cooperation in the work of evangelism: (1) one church supporting one evangelist; (2) one church supporting more than one evangelist; and (3) more than one church supporting one evangelist. In the work of benevolence, the examples are: (1) one church contributing to more than one church to relieve the needy and (2) more than one church contributing to only one church to relieve the needy. But how best to cooperate, with which church, and with which project, are all matters of opinion and are left entirely to the decision of each local church. Hence, no one should elevate his own opinions to the level of law...*and divide the body of Christ*. This surely is the teaching of Scripture concerning congregations cooperating in doing the Lord's work.

Some Important Lessons

From this study on “anti-ism,” we may draw some important lessons:

1. In the sphere where God has made specifications, one must heed them. When the Lord gives a command which includes the method, then the method is part of the command. All that the Lord says on any subject, nothing more, nothing less, and nothing different, we must do.
2. When the Lord has not legislated, man has no right to legislate. Man errs by adding to God's Word in making opinions the law of Christ. It is just as sinful to make matters of opinion matters of faith, as it is to make matters of faith matters of opinion. In the work of the church, when God has made no specifications, Christians should not make them and try to bind them on others. We are *“to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints”* (Jude 3, ASV, emph. supplied), and *not our opinions*.
3. When the Lord gives a command without specifying its methodology, then man must discharge it with the best means and methods available in obeying His will. Various circumstances and conditions will determine this.

All who are interested in teaching the gospel and promoting pure, New Testament Christianity, should

keep these rules in mind. The pioneers of the Restoration Movement had a very apt saying which clearly expressed the teaching of the Scriptures: "In matters of *faith*, unity; in matters of *opinion*, liberty; in *all things*, charity."

Conclusion

"Anti-ism," as it applies to the work of the church, is man making laws where God has not made them and trying to bind them on others to the divisions of the body of Christ. All must have a zeal for God, but it must be according to knowledge (Romans 10:2). Indeed, each follower of Christ must be governed by the Bible. But sometimes some become opinionated and divide congregations, completely oblivious to the fact that some sound thinking and logical reasoning, in harmony with the Holy Scriptures, would avert division and strengthen unity in brotherly love.

Knowing and defending the gospel of Christ is of utmost importance; but at the same time, there is no place for harsh, abusive, and intemperate words and deeds in connection therewith. for, as Paul wrote to Timothy: *"...the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth"* (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Some, however, seem to find it much easier to denounce those who differ from them, than to support their own opinions by sober Scriptural reasoning and practice (cf. Romans 16:17-18).

"Let brotherly love continue" (Hebrews 13:1). "Anti-ism" has over the years driven many into the "liberal" movement. One extreme is just as wrong as the other. Brethren need to be aware that the pendulum can also swing to the other end of the spectrum, "loosing where God has bound," ignoring the true *pattern* God has given in His Word (2 Timothy 1:13, ASV). The great threat now to churches of Christ seems to be not "anti-ism" but "liberalism." May the churches remain true to the teaching of the Bible. The times are critical.

Works Cited

Webster's New International Dictionary, second edition, unabridged. (n.c.): (n.p.), (1956).